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Let me state categorically that no danger whatever attaches to any of my publications, so long as readers take a number of elementary precautions.

The chance of infection is minimal not to say non-existent. One of my scientific advisers has assured me that readers can go on buying my paper and only run the risk of minor side-effects, such as irritation and drowsiness.

Let me stress again that not a single person has died as a result of reading the Daily Turkeygraph – so I advise you all to go on buying it.

It's cheap. It's tasty. And it's BOOTIFUL (see *"Yes it's Fishnet Fergie!"*, page 94).

E. Strobes,
pp Lord Gnome,
The Old Incinerator,
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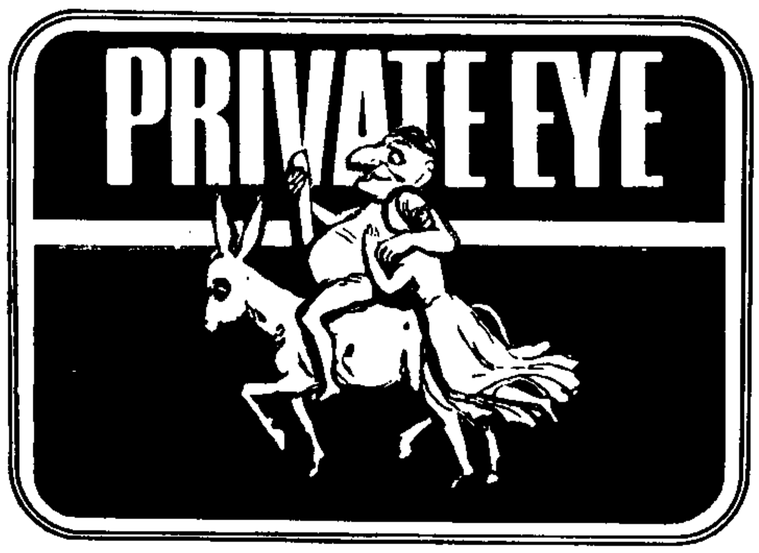

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IN OFFLOADING its remaining stake in QinetiQ (the privatised Defence Evaluation and Research Agency) and making £300m profit on a £42m investment, the US private equity firm Carlyle has exposed official justifications for its involvement for the nonsense they always were.

Carlyle was supposedly brought in for its management expertise. When the agency, which was part-privatised in 2002, was fully floated on the stock market last year, then Defence Secretary John Reid defended the huge gain Carlyle made on its shares. The Americans' investment and management was important, he claimed, as "the MoD is very good at certain things but it is not necessarily good at running companies". In 2003, QinetiQ's managers, who have also done very nicely out of the privatisation, explained to Parliament that Carlyle was chosen as an investor as "a good match for QinetiQ because its experience enabled it to understand and commit to the QinetiQ business plan".

That commitment, it emerges to nobody's great surprise, extended only until the time was right to cash in the chips for the most cash – something that the National Audit Office, currently examining the sell-off, may wish to ponder.

SHADOW foreign secretary William Hague was quick to rush to the defence of his leader after it emerged that David Cameron had smoked cannabis as a 15-year-old: "He has always been very clear that your life before you went into politics is a private life... We all did things that we regret and it is one of those things, I suppose."

It would, of course, be an entirely different matter were a Conservative leader to try to make political capital out of his illegal schoolboy activities. Such as, for instance, boasting to a lad mag that "my holiday job when I was 15 to 21 was as the driver's mate, delivering the bottles and beer around South Yorkshire... We used to have a pint at every stop – and we used to have about ten stops in a day. You worked so hard you didn't feel you'd drunk 10 pints by four o'clock you used to sweat so much. It's probably horrifying but we used to do that, then go home for tea, and then go out in the evening to the pub. I think when you are a teenager you can do that... and it was a great education actually."

Journalists who questioned the veracity of Mr Hague's account (for it was he) in *GQ* back in August 2000 were informed by indignant staff at Conservative Central Office, "We can get you firm evidence he drank 14 pints. He used to regularly come home completely plastered."

WHETHER or not anyone in Downing Street is charged as a result of Inspector Knacker's sleuthing, his work has already had one delicious but unnoticed consequence.

The US government's Visa Waiver scheme allows citizens of most western countries to enter America – but only if they have completely "clean" records. This excludes not only convicted felons but also anyone who has ever been arrested, however briefly, for any reason whatsoever, even if no further police action followed.

This group already includes four Blair acolytes – most notably the lovely Ruth Turner and the enigmatic Lord Levy, both of whom have been formally arrested and are now permanently banned from entering the US through the normal channels. Should they wish to visit prospective employers or donors across the Atlantic, their only hope now is to schedule a costly interview with consular officials at the US embassy. And, as the embassy website warns, such visa applications "are subject to a greater degree of scrutiny than in the past". It's a long and cumbersome process.

Were Knacker's team to arrest Blair's chief-of-staff Jonathan Powell, or even the Vicar himself, the long-term consequences could be severe. Neither man has much chance of collecting lucrative British or European directorships any decade soon, so their future financial well-being rests on easy access to the American corporate and academic markets. Obviously, given those draconian American visa conditions, even the briefest arrest would make it hard for companies and think-tanks to hire them as advisors or guest speakers.

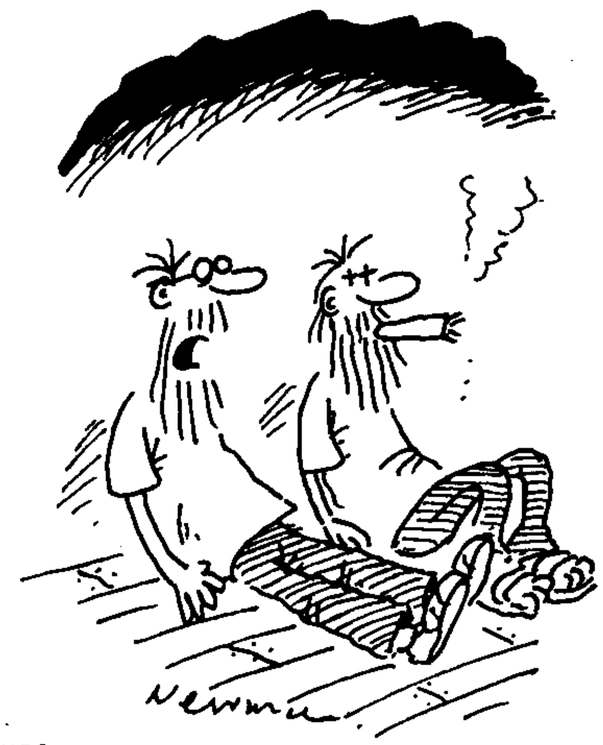
Such an unfortunate outcome should of course in no way influence A.C. Yates of the Yard as he ponders whether it's necessary to feel more collars in the days ahead.

"Tessa Jowell, the culture, media and sport secretary, has already been forced to admit that the original £2.375 billion core budget [for the Olympics] must rise by £900 million, partly to pay for consultants to keep the costs down."
– Daily Telegraph.

SEVERN TRENT's takeover of privatised water in Trinidad, backed by the UK's Department for International Development, worked out so well that in 1999 Trinidad's government ended the contract and sent the water company home.

However, that failure didn't stop DfID from funding Severn Trent's £3.2m contract to take over water in Guyana in 2002.

The Guyana contract, which was supposed to ensure proper water supplies to 85 percent of the country, was not due to end until December. But after five years of missed performance targets, the board of Guyana Water Inc decided last week to ... terminate the contract early.



"If you can remember your time at Eton you weren't there"

Street Of Shame

"DAVID CAMERON's dodging of legitimate questions over drugs leave him looking distinctly evasive," thundered the *Daily Mirror*'s editorial column the morning after it was revealed that the Conservative leader did a Bad Thing when he was a child.

"The Tory leader has a duty to explain what substances he took, and when, if he desires the public to have faith in him… Cameron's crass insistence that voters have no right to know details of a private past, in other words much of his life, smacks of arrogance. His self-imposed silence is a weakness not a strength."

Over in the *Mail*, Melanie Phillips was in full agreement: "The problem has been the shifty way in which Mr Cameron has ducked these allegations, and the way this feeds into a pervasive concern about his attitude towards drugs in general… The more he doesn't want to tell us, the more urgently we need to know."

Back in October 2005, when questions about Mr Cameron's youthful drug use first surfaced, the *Eye* contacted every editor in Fleet Street to ask, in the interests of openness, whether they had ever taken illegal drugs. Apart from Martin Townsend of the *Sunday Express*, who was happy to admit he had not, every other editor – including the *Mirror*'s Richard Wallace and Paul Dacre of the *Daily Mail* – has yet to get back to us with an answer.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"BLACKPOOL BEST BET FOR SUPERCASINO: RESORT BID FAVOURITE" – **Mirror** headline on 29 January

"BLAIR PICKS THE SAFE BET" – **Mirror** headline on 31 January, the morning after Manchester won the supercasino bid

"TODAY's newspapers aren't necessarily about news," announced *Mirror* editor Richard Wallace in an interview on 1 February. "It's no secret that I have taken the *Mirror* down a more magazine-style road."

That much was evident in a story inexplicably placed in his paper's news section the previous day: "Humiliated into losing 19 stone", it told the harrowing tale of how Maureen Edwards had decided to go on a diet after becoming wedged in a garden chair. "Maureen slimmed down from an astonishing 28 stone to just nine with the help of a hypnotist's weight loss CD and a sack load of determination," reported impressed hack Brian Roberts. "Speaking of her BBQ chair ordeal, she said last night: 'It was one of those white plastic outdoor ones and I just couldn't get out…'"

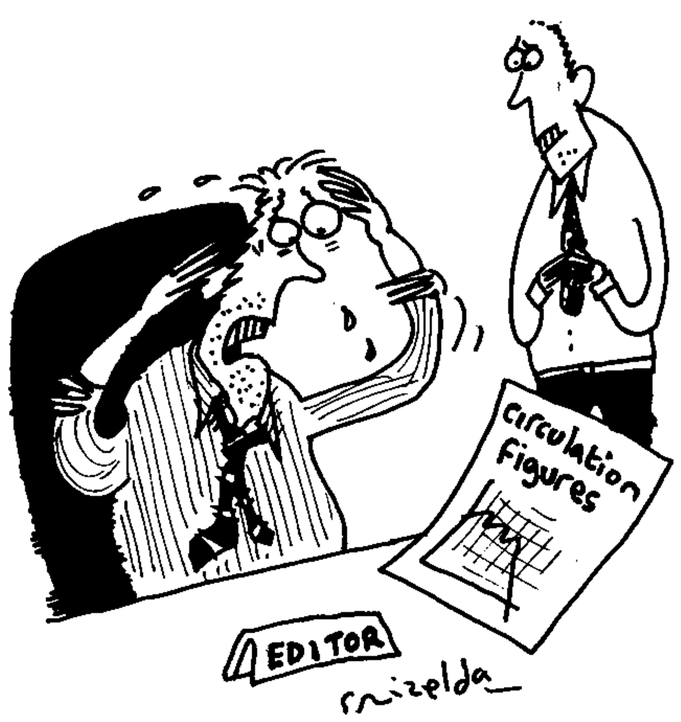
Mrs Edwards also seems to possess impressive powers of memory, given that the seven paragraphs of quotes she gave to Roberts were word-for-word identical to the testimonial she penned for Paul McKenna's book *I Can Make You Thin*, published in January 2005, the very year that the paper claimed the incident occurred. Her account also appeared in the *Sun*'s serialisation of the book that same month as well as on the hypnotist's website, paulmckenna.com.

Curiously, however, she appeared not to be able to remember Mr McKenna's name, which did not appear anywhere in the *Mirror* article. Naturally this has nothing to do with the fact that the paper had to pay out libel damages to the hypnotist last summer after a nine-year legal battle over his qualifications.

"A GANG of internet perverts who plotted to rape two young sisters were yesterday jailed for a total of 27 years," the *Sun* reported on 6 February.

"Alan Hedgcock, 41, sent out pictures of the two girls aged 13 and 14 in school uniforms and said they walked through woods near his home… Hedgcock, of Twickenham, South West London, admitted he sent messages for sexual kicks but maintained he had never intended to take the fantasy further."

Four pages later, showbiz columnist Victoria Newton had a full-page picture treat for her readers: "Here are GIRLS ALOUD fulfilling every man's St Trinian's fantasy – in saucy school uniforms."



"The public aren't panicking about bird flu!"

***DAILY EXPRESS* editor Peter "Mentally" Hill was in typically pugnacious form while defending his newspaper's coverage of asylum seekers before MPs and peers at the joint committee on human rights.**

"If a subject is an emotive subject, I see no reason why I should not use emotive language," said Hill, defending a string of headlines such as "ASYLUM SEEKERS SPREADING AIDS ACROSS BRITAIN" and "REFUGEES ARE FLOODING INTO THE UK LIKE ANTS".

Asked if he had ever actually met an asylum seeker, Hill replied: "I have not. I have met representatives of the Romanian Government on a similar and associated topic but I have not met any asylum seekers."

Chairman Andrew Dismore MP then asked if any *Express* hacks had ever complained to the editor that they had been "asked to write stories that they do not think are appropriate". Hill replied: "No… I would never put any of my journalists under pressure to write something that they did not want to write."

Oh dear. It seems to have slipped his mind that in 2004 a crowded meeting of *Express* journalists in the paper's NUJ chapel passed the following motion: "This chapel is concerned that *Express* journalists are coming under pressure to write anti-Gypsy articles." So concerned were the hacks about a string of anti-Gypsy articles that they even wrote to the Press Complaints Commission to complain about their own newspaper and remind the PCC of "the need to protect journalists who are unwilling to write racist articles".

The PCC dismissed the hacks' concerns out of hand. By happy coincidence, Peter Hill himself was – and still is – a member of the PCC.

"THEY are some of the most offensive and ugly words in the English language," the *Sun* declared as it persuaded some photogenic schoolchildren to pose holding placards with racist insults for a "Special Racism Issue". "But today the *Sun* makes no apology for printing them – or the pictures showing children who are the innocent victims of such repugnant insults."

But what of 12-year-old Sean Callen who, the paper solemnly reported, "hates the insult 'Chav' – a jibe at white working class people who wear brash designer clothes. It shows white people can be victims of bigots, too." Would that include bigots such as *Sun* columnist Victoria Newton, who wrote two days later that "this fad used to be restricted to Chavs such as Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan. Now the vile trend is spreading to high society – how low." Or her colleague Jane Moore, who greeted Jade Goody's eviction from *Celebrity Big Brother* on 24 January with the words, "so farewell then, Jade Goody, poster girl to the ignorant underclass and everyone else's acceptable face of chav." Or indeed *Sun* deputy editor Fergus Shanahan, who asked on 19 Jan, "Is anyone really surprised that Jade has turned out to be such a horror? She's a chav. This is how chavs behave."

"NO SEX please, we're English and it affects our performance," is the stern advice to England's sportsmen from Sue Mott, the *Daily Telegraph*'s Sally Jockstrap.

In the Ashes series, as in last summer's World Cup, it was the WAGs wot lost it. "Can you imagine going off to work with your other half?" she asks in horror. "It is teetering on the verge of insanity."

She should know: Ms Jockstrap's other half is David Welch, her former sports editor at the *Telegraph*. She divorced Robert Phillip and went off with Welch while all three worked together in the *Telegraph* sport department.

Welch is still a business colleague as well as an other half. He's now an agent representing sports hacks – and one of his clients is Sue Mott.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"When you lose authority, that's it… The truth is that British politics is in suspension and will not be revived until the handover of the Labour leadership. We are living through a curiously pointless time, a dead season… Come on, prime minister. You have surely noticed: the longer it goes on, the worse it gets." – Jackie Ashley, **Guardian**, 18 December 2006.

"Tony Blair should not quit… A Blair resignation this month or next would actually make life harder for his party…. It is not particularly in anyone's interests to hustle Blair out of the door." – Jackie Ashley, **Guardian**, 5 February 2007.

"OUR waste causes death and disease 6,000 miles from home," warned Clifford Coonan in his apocalyptic contribution to the *Independent*'s "Campaign Against Waste" on 26 January. "China is rapidly becoming Britain's biggest rubbish dump. Britain dumps around two million tonnes of waste in China every year, everything from plastic mineral water bottles to shopping bags and other forms of superfluous packaging."

How unfortunate that on the very same day, branches of WH Smith were giving away a free 750ml plastic bottle of French mineral water with every copy of the *Independent*.

Lest we forget, drinking bottled water was described as "environmental insanity" last June by one newspaper, which pointed out that "the energy cost of producing a billion plastic bottles from by-products of crude oil, transporting the water over hundreds or thousands of miles and then disposing of the containers in landfill sites or incinerators made bottled water one of Britain's most wasteful luxuries." Its name? The *Independent*.

It would be churlish to claim that the paper's campaign has scored no victories however. Within days of its launch one major media group dropped its practice of enclosing the four supplements and assorted wallcharts, postcards, CDs, CD-Roms and DVDs it gives away free each Saturday in a sealed plastic bag. Curiously, the *Independent* declined to take any credit for its move – or even acknowledge the hundreds of emails from readers it had received complaining about the practice.

IN A sensational exclusive, the *People* revealed a few weeks ago that Robbie Williams is learning Cockney rhyming slang because he wants to play an East End gangster in a film.

"The pop superstar wants to ditch his Stoke-on-Trent accent to play an ex-boxer turned East London 'Mr Big'," it reported. "A source said: 'Robbie read about the character in a book called *Till Death Us Do Part* and it blew him away. But he knows he has got to sound like a Cockney if he wants the part.'"

The byline on the story was "Garry Johnson". By an amazing coincidence, the author of *Till Death Us Do Part* is "Garry Jackson" – a pseudonym of the selfsame Garry Johnson. His novel is published by New Breed Books, a firm run by a hulking bouncer named Jamie O'Keefe. Unusually for a publishing house, it also offers classes in combat skills and self-defence.

Still, the book comes with an ecstatic tribute from our old friend Garry Bushell, TV columnist for, er, the *People*: "Bloody brilliant… If there's a better revenge novel around, I'd like to read it." Johnson has been a mucker of the other Garry since the days of the Oi! rock scene in the early 1980s, when Bushell was lead singer of the Gonads and Johnson sang in the Buzz Kids. Johnson is also the author of *The Story of Oi!* – and of a hagiography of Bushell which can be found on the great man's website.

Alas, Inspector Knacker isn't as impressed as Bushell by *Till Death Us Do Part*, which seems to be based very loosely on Johnson's own marriage break-up – the main difference being that the protagonist enlists the help of the underworld to extract revenge on the unsavoury character with whom his fictional wife has run off. Two weeks ago Johnson was arrested at his home in Wickford, Essex, and hauled off to Basildon police station, since Knacker had apparently interpreted the book as a "death threat".

We trust this silly misunderstanding will soon be cleared up, before Robbie Williams takes fright. But he may still find Johnson's publisher a bit scary. In an interview four years ago with (inevitably) the *People*, Jamie O'Keefe declared: "If you road-rage me while I have my children in the car, then I would not hesitate to come tearing through your front door at five o'clock in the morning and break every bone in your body before you wipe the sleep from your eyes. I've done that a few times when it was deserved." As Garry Bushell would say: bloody brilliant!

IN HER Glenda Slagg column for the *Daily Mail*, Amanda Platell lets rip at the three female Newsnight presenters who have posed like killer bimbos for a glossy magazine.

"And they think this will make us take them seriously!" she harrumphs. "Sometimes smart women can be really dumb."

Amanda should know. Some years ago she starred in a TV documentary designed to make female editors – and Platell in particular – look really dumb. The title: *Killer Bimbos of Fleet Street*. And she thought it would make us take her seriously!

"Three bags full, sir? That's going to cost you"

THOSE FORECASTS IN FULL

7 February

Met Office says: "Heavy Snow Expected: Accumulations of 2-5cm are expected quite widely inland, with 10-15cm possible for parts of the Midlands and Wales."

***Daily Express* says**: "7 INCHES OF SNOW TO PARALYSE BRITAIN".

9 February

Met Office says: "Weekend: Continuing unsettled with further spells of rain or showers in most places. Any snow generally becoming confined to higher ground in Scotland."

***Daily Express* says**: "IT'S NOT OVER YET: MORE SNOW AND ICE... BRITAIN BRACED FOR ANOTHER WINTRY BLAST THIS WEEKEND."

Brokeback Mountain (see Shaftesbury is the fist film of the year for Yeovil's Cinematheque,

Blackmore Vale Magazine

FORMER *Mirror* political editor and leader-writer David Seymour has been busy since leaving the paper.

First he took up foxhunting and denounced his former paymasters' stance on tally-ho issues, even though he had written many of the rabidly anti-hunting leaders the paper published himself. So pleased were the Buftons at the Countryside Alliance that they appointed him a director of the lobbying outfit.

Seymour then started producing robustly conservative why-oh-why pieces in praise of Middle England for the *Daily Mail*. Now, to top it all, he's joined PR outfit Project Associates, where his distinguished colleagues include Steve "Shagger" Norris and Stuart "Human Sponge" Higgins, former editor of the *Sun*.

Project Associates says it advises heads of state, heads of government and major figures in the world of entertainment and business. A particular area of know-how is litigation PR, where it has expertly handled the affairs of the Princess Diana Memorial Fund in its battle with Franklin Mint. Alas, the fund lost its legal battle and was more than £10m out of pocket as a result.

The firm also represented Gtech, the US lottery company whose former boss Guy Snowden sued Richard Branson for libel and lost, effectively destroying his career. But perhaps its finest hour was representing Giles Carlyle-Clarke, a drug peddler, in his fight against deportation to the US. After Project Associates' expert handling of the case, Carlyle-Clarke was deported to Alabama in July. Last week he was sentenced to three years in the slammer for his part in a conspiracy to import vast quantities of marijuana into the US.

Dope is a subject close to Seymour's heart: during his time at the *Mirror* he often shut himself away in an empty side-office for an inspiring toke or three. It is not, however, a topic on which he has yet seen fit to write a why-oh-why philippic in the *Mail*.

THE *Daily Express*'s "Day & Night" column has managed yet another exciting scoop.

On 2 February it reported that "Cult Sixties' sci-fi TV series *The Prisoner* is to be remade for a 21st century audience. Sky One has just commissioned the new series… Casting for the lead has not yet been decided but former *Doctor Who* Christopher Eccleston is understood to be in the running."

Quite right – if by "just commissioned" the paper was referring to November 2005, when Sky announced the remake. Rumours of Eccleston's involvement surfaced a mere nine months ago, meaning that the *Express* was only scooped by the *Times*, *Telegraph*, *Mirror*, *Star*, *Daily Record*, *Western Mail*, *Liverpool Daily Post* and, er, *Borehamwood Times*.

SO FAREWELL then, John Edwards. The "legendary" *Daily Mail* hack marked his retirement last week with a hilariously immodest two-page spread, headlined "THE MAN WHO WITNESSED HISTORY".

"Nothing is for ever," he began, in the staccato style he copied from an American reporter decades ago. "Things come and they go. Like people and buildings. And columns in a newspaper. This is one of them. It closes down today."

At which point one can almost hear Paul Dacre groaning: *Get on with it! (Ed.)* But Edwards can't be rushed. "Time builds a high wall around you and makes the memory struggle in the shade," he discloses. "I have been trying to remember."

Could the struggle with memory be related to Edwards's many years of browsing and sluicing in bars around the world – and indeed in the vicinity of the *Mail* HQ? In his later years Edwards was allowed to drift around the office in a post-prandial haze, writing one very boring weekly column in his weird present-tense reportage. He was never rewritten, mainly because the curious reporting style was very difficult to edit. "Take out one word," a long-suffering sub-editor complained, "and the whole bloody thing falls to pieces."

Dacre was happy to tolerate this, knowing that Edwards would soon retire and save him the expense of a large redundancy cheque. It was a scheme that also worked with Peter Paterson, the veteran TV critic who recently collected his pension after several millennia and was not replaced. The next target is Keith Waterhouse, whom Dacre's lieutenants regard as "old hat". Alas for them, Waterhouse doggedly refuses to retire.

But back to Edwards's valedictory epic, notable for scarcely mentioning anything he'd covered in the past 20 years or more. After much brow-furrowing, the man who witnessed history is at last beginning to dredge up some memories. "There were six American presidents to cover. I met them all. That was a good meeting with President John F. Kennedy in Mussel Shoals, Tennessee. He was opening some part of a power station…"

Oddly, Edwards omits to say when or where he met the other five US presidents who enjoyed his company. And though he regarded the encounter with JFK as "a good meeting", it may not have had quite such a profound impact on the president himself. As Kennedy walked down a line of hacks and shook their hands, the conversation went like this:

JFK: "Where are you from?"
Edwards: "London, sir."
JFK: "Say hello from me."
And, er, that's it. Historic indeed!

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

A GUIDE by *Sun* hackette Emma Pryer.

1 Pen report on Kylie Minogue's visit to exhibition of her own costumes at V&A for *Sun* website, remembering to preface all mentions of singer with adjectives "brave" or "plucky".

2 Insert quote from "Fan Annabel Roberts" who thinks "She looked so beautiful. She won't find it hard bagging a new man. After all she's been through, she deserves the fairytale." Do not worry about fact that Annabel Roberts did not attend exhibition or see Kylie at any point.

3 Email said Annabel Roberts and other friends, pointing out that "After Annabel's boyfriend Dan scored a picture of him and Hugh Grant on a night out with me I couldn't resist getting Annabel a plug in the paper…. Check out today's coverage from last night's Kylie event…. Ha!"

4 Watch as boss and "Showbiz Writer Of The Year" Victoria Newton plucks report from website and publishes it in paper underneath own byline.

The PM-in-waiting, with Jeff Immelt and Lord Browne right behind him

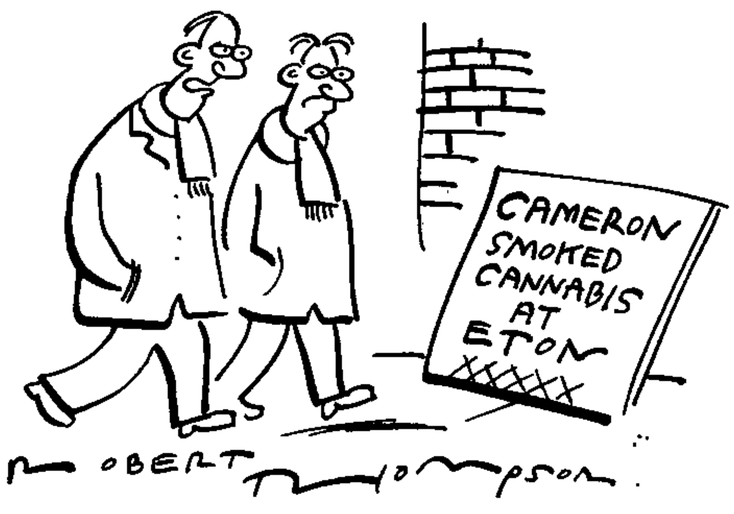
BROWN-NOSES OUT OF JOINT

OVER the past couple of years the Chancellor has been keen to associate himself with some successful businessmen. A shame, then, that one by one they're now being disgraced.

Latest to come in for a pasting from regulators is Jeff Immelt, chief executive of General Electric, who was a star speaker at Gordon's enterprise conference in 2005. His organisation's favoured brand of "enterprise" has been exposed with a £610,000 fine for GE Capital, which operates store cards in the UK, for ripping off customers with unnecessary payment protection insurance. The firm didn't bother to find out whether customers needed the insurance and failed to act when it knew its procedures were defective.

Also dispensing wisdom at the enterprise conference was BP chairman Lord Browne, who recently admitted "moral responsibility" for neglect of safety at a Texas refinery where an explosion two years ago killed 15 workers and injured 170 more. His carefully worded admission, avoiding the question of legal responsibility, is in fact the work of a PR guru called Peter Hargitay who sold the phrase to Union Carbide executives after the Bhopal disaster in India twenty years ago, and who now puts a gloss on corruption at the top of world football at FIFA.

Browne is leaving BP to become chairman of the supervisory board of private equity outfit Apax. The firm has recently teamed up with South Africa's Netcare to take control of General Healthcare, a leading provider of "independent treatment" to NHS patients – who must hope his supervision efforts get a sharper focus on safety than they did at BP.



"At last some substance, even if it is illegal"

CALLED TO ORDURE

VERA BAIRD QC must wonder if it is worth being a lowly minister.

The giraffe-like Baird is regarded, not least by herself, as formidably intelligent and left-wing to the core. The one snag: as a mere under-secretary of state (about as low as it gets at Westminster, job-wise) she can't oppose the government's moves to dilute Freedom of Information. Indeed, it is her job to steer some distinctly un-left-wing changes to FOI through Parliament.

Senior MPs from all sides attacked Baird's Constitutional Affairs Department the other day. Don Touhig (Islwyn), a former defence minister, said any change to FOI on cost grounds would be "mean-spirited and unworthy of my party". He recalled that pre-1997 Tony Blair loved to preach about the importance of transparency. But Peter Kilfoyle (Lab, Liverpool Walton), another ex defence minister, felt that "the higher reaches of the civil service, the quangocracy that surrounds it and leading members of the government" had long hated FOI.

Government spin doctors have tried to blame the press for making trivial FOI requests. In fact hacks are only responsible for 10 per cent of requests. MPs are among the busiest users of the new system. Jim Cousins (Lab, Newcastle) said he has to use FOI simply to get the minutes of one of his local housing renewal bodies.

Several MPs used the debate to give their constituency newspapers a plug. This is a time-honoured way of sucking up to a local rag. Kilfoyle mentioned the *Liverpool Echo* and *Liverpool Daily Post*. Dan Rogerson (Lib Dem, North Cornwall) spoke of the *Western Morning News*. Tim Farron (Lib Dem, Westmorland & Lonsdale) name-checked the *Westmorland Gazette*. Henry Bellingham (Con, NW Norfolk) saluted the *Cambridge Evening News*. Phil Willis, citing the *Yorkshire Post*, argued that FOI digging by provincial newspapers prevented extravagance by local authorities. FOI could actually save the public money.

Mark Fisher (Lab, Stoke) used the words "appalling and laughable" to describe Baird & Co's proposals but perhaps no one was quite as angry as Labour's Tony Wright (Cannock Chase). "We have done something we are proud of and it is beginning to improve the quality of our democracy. Then we say we'd like to introduce some restrictions so that it does not work so effectively. It is utterly bizarre."

Wright cast a hawkish eye at Baird and said that he knew she didn't really want the proposed changes. "One of the penalties of being a minister is that they have to read out things they know are not true," he said, witheringly. Norman Baker, who said he knows Baird personally, added: "She knows in her heart of hearts that the proposals are an attempt to kick the legs from under the Freedom of Information Act."

Yet when her chance came Baird made a sour little speech. She said it was "ludicrous" that ministers' time, when examining FOI requests, was charged at only £25 an hour. "It is really worth zillions," she snorted, perhaps briefly thinking she was back in her legal Chambers. The current charging arrangements were "mad" (translation: far too affordable for the public). "My blood gets hot when I think of my constituents in Redcar having to subsidise, on my department's estimate, the BBC's research budget by about £1m a year," she snapped.

Given that the total cost for FOI in the whole country is £35m a year, can she be right about this claim? Perhaps we should put in an FOI request to find out. While we still can.

'Gavel Basher'

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

30 Jan, 3.32pm: "Let me be very clear: Las Vegas is not coming to Great Britain"

– Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell outlines government position on the Casino Advisory Panel decision, House of Commons

30 Jan, 2.27pm: "VEGAS COMES TO TOWN"

– NHS gives official reaction to Casino Advisory Panel decision, NHS Direct website

"DAVID CAMERON's Conservatives are able to pay off their debts after a bumper property deal on their old HQ," the *Evening Standard* reported last Friday. And the man responsible for this triumph? Step forward Christopher Moran.

This gave the *Standard* a chance to run yet another gushing profile of the "former Lloyd's and stock market broker, [who] made his money first in the City in the Eighties and early Nineties and then in property".

No mention, however, of his more noteworthy achievements from those decades. In 1982 he became the first underwriter in 300 years to be voted out of Lloyd's of London – and disbarred for life – for "discreditable conduct". In 1986 he was censured by the London Stock Exchange. And in 1991 he was fined $500,000 in absentia by the SEC in New York for insider trading.

Oh, and he has the rare honour of having been turned down by the Tory party when he offered to fund a right-wing think-tank, the modestly named "Christopher Moran Foundation". But that was in the sleaze-free (*sic*) days of John Major; young Dave clearly has no such qualms.

WHO will help poor BAE, lately tarnished by the Saudi arms scandal, to polish its reputation without reference to bribery, commission payments or secret accounts?

Step forward the Smith Institute, Gordon Brown's favourite think tank and a frequent visitor to Number 11. Run by long-time henchman Wilf Stevenson, it gives Brownites an opportunity to mix with corporate executives.

Now the Smith Institute has accepted funding from BAE Systems for a booklet called "Trade Unions and Globalisation", which includes chapters by such eager scribes as Ed Balls, the Treasury minister who formerly worked at the Smith Institute, and Ian McCartney, the Foreign Office minister in charge of helping British business abroad.

While much of the booklet concerns trade union struggles with large companies, BAE is rewarded for its largesse with a section in which to make claims for its own employment credentials. The arms firm asserts that "the drive for Economic success should be combined with traditions of social obligation and a broad Moral commitment to civic improvement" – a moral commitment not obviously on show in the Saudi affair. That scandal goes unmentioned, but BAE does describe its "joint lobbying model – which provides assistance to union representatives when lobbying MPs, ministers and local/regional government for work that will lead to sustaining capabilities and skills within BAE Systems" – an allusion, perhaps, to the way jobs can be used to trump corruption claims.

In a further act of generosity, the company helped pay for a launch party. The Foreign Office has confirmed that Ian McCartney attended the launch, and *Private Eye* understands that Ed Balls also found time to pop along.

"I just heard the last turkey"

EVERY Thursday in the Commons, at 11.30am, Tory frontbencher Theresa May – she of the snazzy shoes – asks the Leader of the House, Jack Straw, about the coming week's agenda.

The exact formula May uses is: "I wonder if the Leader of the House can give me the business."

Give me the business? It's a brave woman who says that to raffish Jack!

A FLOTILLA of 20 Thames river boats that tooted their horns while passing the Houses of Parliament has fallen foul of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (SOCPA) because the Thames passes too close to the Palace of Westminster.

The boat owners were protesting against changes to boatmen's training and licensing rules, which they believe could compromise safety on the river. The change follows an EU directive on harmonising the licensing system across Europe, but the boatmen's union, the RMT, says the government could make use of an opt-out allowing higher standards on difficult tidal waters, such as the Thames. Otherwise, inexperienced 16-year-olds could be allowed to take control of large boats.

Lord Bassam told Parliament that the Metropolitan police are going to "write to the owners of each vessel informing them that they held an unauthorised demonstration" – a terrific use of their time and resources!

Another flotilla – of 30 canal boats protesting against cuts of more than £21m to British Waterways funding in the past three years – also lined up outside Parliament a few days later, having obtained police permission.

Introducing for the second time her Public Demonstration (Repeals) Bill, to remove those bits of SOCPA banning protest outside Parliament, just days after the boat protests, Baroness Miller said that many people are now frightened of demonstrating in the capital because they are unsure of how to legally take part in a protest.

Number crunchings

5 x salary

■ Maximum available as mortgage from High Street banks "to those with stable jobs"

25 x salary

■ Mortgages currently held by Tony Blair

MAN IN THE EYE

JOHN McTERNAN

BLAIR's "political secretary" John McTernan – interviewed by police in the cash for honours affair – has reportedly helped them find "smoking gun" documents. The scandal could scupper his efforts to save Labour in the May elections for the Scottish Assembly. If so, it will not be the first time McTernan has been on the scene at a Labour disaster.

In 1995, as a Southwark councillor, McTernan became Harriet Harman's adviser around the time she caught flak for sending her son to St Olave's Grammar School in Bromley. Hatty considered Southwark's schools no good – unfortunate, given that McTernan had been the chairman of Southwark's education committee.

Our man did his best to polish Harman's image and that of her deputy Frank Field when she became social security secretary – admittedly a tough job as the ministers fought each other in private while performing badly in public. The result? They were both sacked after a year in government, and Harman was forced to spend three more years in the wilderness.

Four years later McTernan was working for Labour Lord Waheed Alli when he was drafted in to help Frank Dobson's mayoral campaign against Ken Livingstone. His help was, it seems, no help at all, as Dobson went down to a humiliating defeat. Incidentally, among Dobson's other supporters at the time was a donor to the tune of £10,000 – one Barry Townsley, the stockbroker whose £1m loan to Labour features so heavily in the cash for honours investigation.

Continuing his dynamic trajectory, in November 2000 McTernan was dispatched to become chief of staff to Labour's new First Minister in Holyrood, Henry McLeish. Within a year McLeish was forced to resign and then left politics altogether because of a scandal involving unaccounted funds and rule breaking. McTernan was closely involved in attempts to get McLeish out of the "officegate" scandal: McLeish had sublet his subsidised constituency office in Fife, but did not declare the rent income or pass it on to the government. He offered to repay the cash, but had no proper records of the money received. McTernan reportedly spent days living on chip suppers while going through McLeish's papers trying to find the right documents. He failed to find them – or save his boss's bacon.

McTernan then spent a year writing for the Scottish and other press, ever willing to make optimistic noises about Iraq and the health service. Before returning to Downing Street he wrote a generous pen portrait of himself, saying: "Most of my adult life I have been able to fix things" because of being "good at getting results". Reflecting on his fast disappearing career, it seems he is the perfect New Labour man: the fixer who leaves everything broken.

MORE evidence of the contempt that civil servants and ministers have for the Freedom of Information Act (*Eyes passim*) – even at the ministry responsible for introducing it, the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

On 7 June last year, *Private Eye* applied for information about the cost of judges' lodgings and a copy of a Court Service report into their luxurious accommodation. Public authorities are supposed to respond to requests under the Act within 20 working days, with another 40 days allowed to consider "public interest" tests.

More than 160 working days later there is still no sign of the information. On 14 December, in response to a formal complaint, the head of the department's Access Rights Unit, Kevin Fraser, said the request "is currently with a Minister", believed to be Baroness Ashton of Upholland, adding: "I should expect to receive that decision during the course of next week."

Needless to say, the *Eye* is still waiting…

YET more proof of the Home Office's difficulties with honesty came on 5 February, when it put out a press notice headlined "New Site for Immigration Centre", announcing that the former RAF Coltishall base was being transferred to the Home Office to expand detention capacity.

Quotes were provided from immigration chiefs explaining that "increasing IND's [the Immigration and Nationality Directorate] detention space is an important step in delivering on Home Secretary John Reid's commitments".

The media dutifully reported that up to 500 illegal immigrants and failed asylum seekers would be locked up at the base, which closed last year. But the next day Keith Simpson, the Norfolk MP whose constituency includes RAF Coltishall, received a letter from immigration director Brian Pollett, offering, er, "additional clarification" on the announcement.

"We are, as we have said all along, considering a number of options to provide the UK with additional immigration removal centre capacity," explained the letter. "If Coltishall is not one of the selected options then our intention would be to revert to original Defence Estates plan for selling the site… We cannot give a precise date for the decision because there are so many different factors on all of the options we are considering."

WITH impeccable timing, the Anglian (Central) Regional Flood Defence Committee announced a £6.4m drop in funding in January – on the same day that several roads in Cambridgeshire were closed by severe flooding and drivers had to be rescued by firefighters.

Most regional committees made announcements during the month, cutting back and postponing schemes intended to protect thousands of homes around Britain. Many of the schemes were devised after the devastating floods of 2000 and residents were already angry about the delays in following experts' recommendations.

In Yorkshire the Regional Flood Defence Committee called off plans for major defence schemes in York (where defences were found to be badly eroded in 2000), Doncaster, Leeds and along the banks of the Humber. Meanwhile a delegation from Lewes in East Sussex, where 1,000 homes were flooded in 2000, met Environment Minister Ian Pearson to ask that something be done to protect them, as very little of the work that was found to be needed after the big floods has yet been tackled.

Lewes' MP Norman Baker also chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Flood Prevention Group and notes that spending on flood defence offers "about the best return of anything government can do", because recovery from flooding is so expensive.

EARLY CONSULTANT

FIVE

Fortune: Million Pound Giveaway (ITV); You Don't Know You're Born (ITV)

THIRTY years ago, when British television was sometimes worth watching, we all sneered at American television for its blandness and lack of originality.

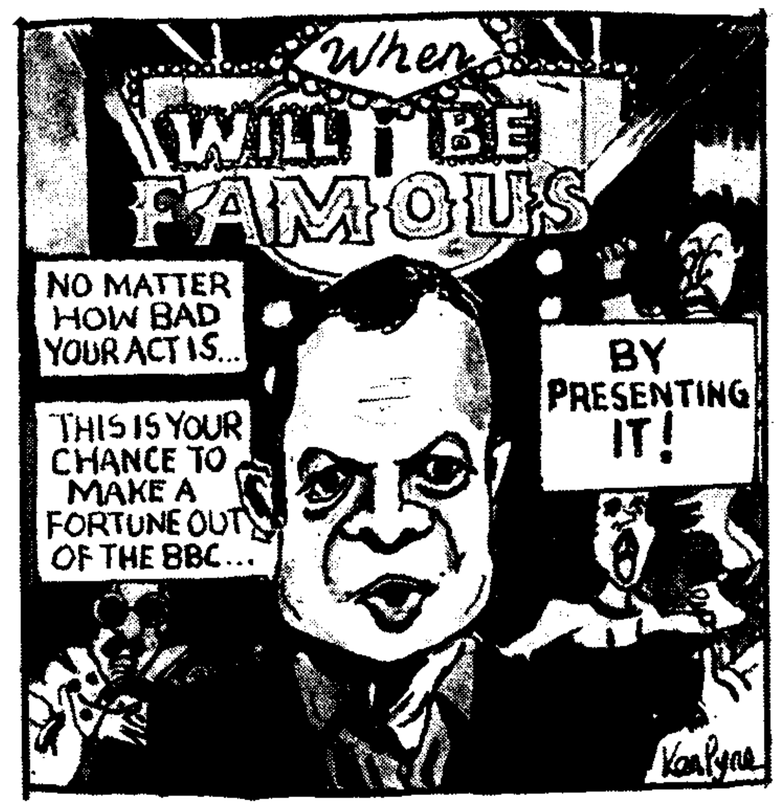
If one western found an audience, eight other westerns would be commissioned. The following year it might be hospital series, and for several years in the mid-1970s it was wall-to-wall detective shows. How we laughed. British television may have been starved of money and glamour – this was, after all, the heyday of Frank Bough – but it was never short of ideas.

Thirty years on, we worship at the shrine of American television, and see nothing wrong with a network making eight or nine identical series, all with the letters "CSI" in their titles. Ideas we still have, but the commissioning process being what it is, we're much more likely to get something made if it's exactly like something else that is doing well at the moment. And nowhere is this more tragically the case than poor old ITV – or "ITV1" as it now wants to be called, like your grandpa wearing a hoodie and saying "wicked" all the time. In this wreck of a network, new ideas are not rejected so much as shied away from, as if infectious. What executives really want is old, proven ideas redone with an ITV slant. Why can't we have *Dragons' Den*, or *Who Do You Think You Are*? It's not fair! Give us something a bit like them, or we'll scream and scream until we're sick!

In *Fortune: Million Pound Giveaway*, members of the public are invited to talk a panel of millionaires into giving them some of their money. Terrifyingly, the Fortune Five includes Jeffrey Archer, described in voiceover as "best-selling novelist and former Tory MP", which hardly scratches the surface, but never mind. As applicants come on stage and make their case, and Archer wrinkles up his forehead at their blasted cheek, it's clear that he is imagining himself playing the one public role he has always been cruelly denied, that of King. On the panel with him are Jacqueline Gold from Ann Summers, grumpy Duncan Bannatyne moonlighting from *Dragons' Den*, a woman from the music business and a man with daft hair. Behind them, unseen but constantly heard, sit a studio audience, as sentimental, gullible and quick to pass judgement as any lynch mob. This week some oldsters dancing to "Copacabana" wanted £8,000 to throw a party for their friends. Archole, man of the people, instantly said yes, his colleagues agreed and an old dear tottered over and gave them all a gummy snog. "Great television," someone in the gallery probably said. Unlike *Dragons' Den*, which is strictly business, this watery version is interested only in non-business proposals, so why then employ five business people to make the decisions? Because the programme doesn't quite know what it is, and hasn't the courage of its convictions, or indeed any convictions at all. It wants the humiliation and panto villainy of *Dragons' Den*, but it also wants light ent. production values and host Richard Madeley cuddling up to cute kids and toothless ancients. Watching it for an hour feels a little like having your brain sucked out by a giant hoover.

For sheer shamelessness, though, you'd do well to beat *You Don't Known You're Born*. So badly does ITV wish it had commissioned *Who Do You Think You Are?* that it has even hired the same production company to make its own version with its own ITV personalities. But since this is ITV, there's less rooting around in dusty libraries, which presumably their viewers find a bit scary, and much more hands-on action. Having discovered that some long-dead relative of his was a tailor, Ken Stott is therefore required to do some tailoring to fill screentime. So a previously fascinating format has been reshaped into something duller and more stupid, because ITV viewers are deemed too thick to cope.

'Remote Controller'


When
WILL I BE FAMOUS
NO MATTER HOW BAD YOUR ACT IS...
THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO MAKE A FORTUNE OUT OF THE BBC...
BY PRESENTING IT!
Kevlyne

DUMB BRITAIN

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: The word "croissant" literally means what shape?

Contestant: Triangle.

Richard Bacon show, XFM

Bacon: Which artist had a blue period?

Contestant: Stalin?

DUMB ARCHIVE

Strike It Rich, Challenge

Michael Barrymore: The category is Famous Women. A ballet dancer who became a dame?

Contestant: Florence Nightingale.

Barrymore: Sorry, I can't take that.

Second contestant: Glenda Jackson.

Barrymore: What did Roger Bannister do in under four minutes in 1954?

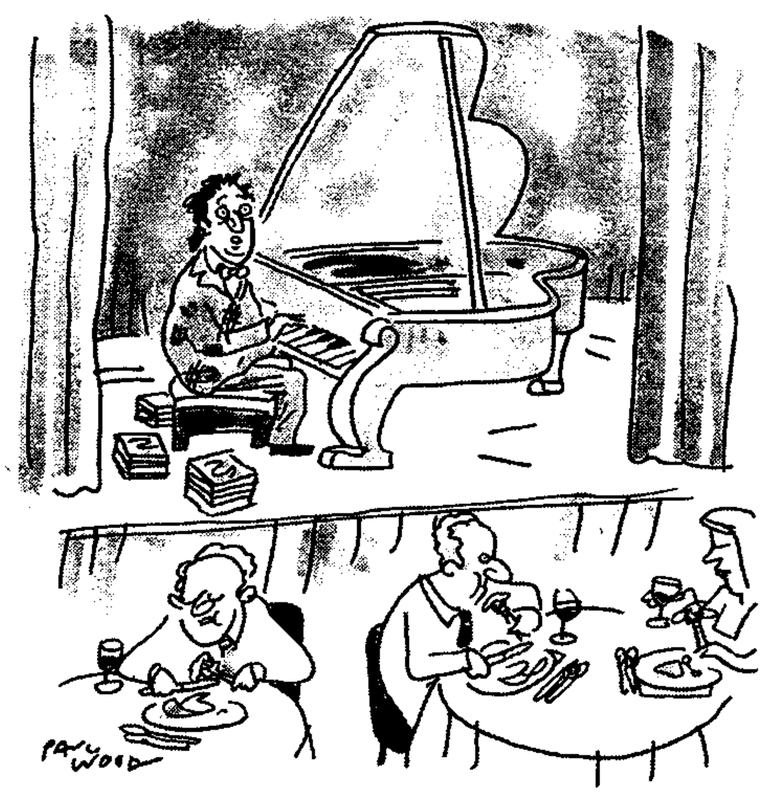
Contestant: Orbit the earth?

MEDIA NEWS

AFTER a frustrating weekend struggling with his new Windows Vista laptop, BBC business editor Robert Peston writes an open letter to Bill Gates, prominently trailed on the BBC news website.

Vista, Peston finds, is "incompatible with two of the vital tools of my trade" – a digital recorder and an IPAQ handheld device – and "makes me regret never having defected to Steve Jobs. Perhaps now's the time". Peston learns that he isn't alone in his Vista-stress. "Over lunch yesterday with the head of a very large media company, I learned of Vista incompatibility problems with financial ramifications that might actually register in Redmond" – Microsoft's HQ.

Perhaps Peston should mention it to his boss, director-general Mark Thompson. On a visit to Seattle last September, Thompson signed a deal with a software company to make the BBC's digital content available "any time, anywhere, and on any device". The firm was, of course, Microsoft.



"I have a CD available with all proceeds helping to alleviate suffering in the jazz world"

ON TOP of the uncertainty caused by the Beeb's "Value For Money" redundancies comes a series of cock-ups that will result in more job losses.

The latest is the decision to axe four extra jobs in News and Current Affairs because the Radio Five Live controller, Bob Shennan, underestimated the cost of covering the cricket and rugby world cups, and now has to cut two news programmes as a result.

This is not a problem for Shennan, who has always preferred sport to news on "his" network. But on the same day that Shennan announced the latest cuts in news, he also made public the fact that Gabby Logan, the gorgeous pouting Sports Personality of the Year 2002 – "much in demand for award ceremonies, motivational speaking and personal appearances" – has been hired "to do a show" for him.

Her salary, by coincidence, matches the four that will be lost to meet those VFM targets.

GIVEN the new urgency of the BBC's "Value For Money" initiative, questions are being asked by BBC News staff about the continuing and pointless use of the Beeb's helicopter.

Its latest mission, costing a little over £1,700 of licence fee-payers' money, was to transport BBC News 24 reporter Sally Nugent to 3,000 feet in order to tell viewers in central England that "from our helicopter, snow has spread as far as the eye can see".

The hackette's report followed a weather forecast on BBC News 24 which revealed conclusively that much of central England was indeed, er, covered in snow.

MORE from BBC Scotland's new HQ at Pacific Quay, Glasgow, which, as the *Eye* reported last December is made almost entirely of large panes of glass in order to "make it clear to its users and visitors who you are and what you do, your values and beliefs, your stories and myths" (*Eye* 1173).

Too clear, it now appears. "Cross-disciplinary design consultancy" Graven Images recently emailed staff requesting ideas for "window vinyl manifestation proposals" which "photographically capture the *range of our output* and the *range of places* that it permeates" as well as "representing the ordinary and everyday ways in which people receive the BBC's output through all the various media whether at home or work, out walking or travelling, urban or rural, city or mountain, farm or fishing, sport or hobby, people or objects" [sic].

What for? "The vinyl will be applied to the clear glass walls of meeting rooms so that you don't walk into them."

FOCUS ON AL JAZEERA

THE sands of time are proving to be a life sentence for British hacks who took Al Jazeera TV's riyal and signed up for international broadcasting's answer to the French Foreign Legion. A cash crisis at the Arabic answer to CNN has left more than 200 hacks and technical staff up the Gulf without a paddle.

Housing, medical, and holiday flights home have been severely cut back, threatening to produce a torrent of defections back to Blighty. The first target of the hacks' rage was Wendy Fagan, head of human resources. She was so upset by their barrage of harsh questions at a mass staff meeting that she slammed her personal computer closed and walked out, saying, "I'm not fucking putting up with this – I've had enough." Fagan caught the next flight out of Doha, where the satellite station is based, never to return.

This transfers the pressure on to her personnel colleague Stephanie Edwards, whose previous attempts to stop a rising wave of staff discontent at GMTV, the UK breakfast time broadcaster, resulted in her being invited to go freelance. Paul Corley, managing director of GMTV, told a colleague at the time, "We need someone who can beat the NUJ at their own game."

That shouldn't be a problem for Edwards this time, as Qatar doesn't enjoy the kind of union laws that we have in Britain. One British hack who tried to form a chapel (office branch) of the NUJ was summarily dismissed from Al Jazeera. Some angry employees hit back by contributing to the Friends of Al Jazeera website. But few have posted anything of late, after the Arabic management claimed that they knew who the dirty bloggers were and would fire them if they did it again – though if they really knew who was leaking the stuff it seems more likely they would simply have sacked them on the spot.

Another ex-GMTV employee who may be regretting his defection to Al Jazeera is Alan Fisher, for whom the final straw at GMTV was being asked to do an item about returned Christmas presents. Fisher boasted at his leaving party of how he would soon be jetting round Europe and beyond as a "roving correspondent" based in the London newsroom.

Alas, it was not to be. The Al Jazeera forward planning unit spent weeks clearing his papers for the Davos summit, but at the last moment one of the Arabic senior management decided that a reporter called Mohammed from the Arabic service would be a better choice. Poor Mohammed – fondly known as "Half a Mo" – got lost at Frankfurt Airport, and only managed to cover the final day of the event.

Meanwhile one of the Al Jazeera anchors in London, Stephen Cole, is eagerly eyeing up new opportunities in Doha. One of the reasons he was hired is that he broke the BBC strike in May 2005, proudly presenting the six and ten o'clock news on BBC1 while his colleagues were outside on the picket line protesting at plans for 3,800 redundancies. He is no doubt ready to carry out a similar "service" for Al Jaz, should hacks display any tendencies towards industrial democracy in the shifting sands of Doha.

GOING LIVE

"Nina Nannar is live on the red carpet for us," busy covering the BAFTAs for ITV News. So, "let's go live to her now".

"Well they've taken the red carpet away and are packing up because all the stars are now inside," reveals Nannar, ITV's media and arts correspondent.

NEWS FROM THE SANDPIT

WHY has it taken the Septics so long to "notice" daily discoveries of Iranian weapons, and, indeed, insurgents with Iranian identity cards, in southern Iraq? And why has the MoD gone along with the pretence that our Iranian friends are not involved in the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan? Operation Persian Freedom draws ever closer.

Meanwhile, why has Andrew Walker, one of three assistant deputy coroners drafted in to examine a shocking backlog of inquests into the deaths of service personnel, been told that his contract is not to be renewed?

The Ministry of Defence says the backlog has been sufficiently reduced to let him go. But Walker has been rather outspoken during his time on the bench.

It was Walker who blamed the MoD for failing to equip British soldiers with the advanced Osprey body armour system. "To send soldiers into a combat zone without the appropriate basic equipment is, in my view, unforgivable and inexcusable and represents a breach of trust that the soldiers have in those in government," he said, recording a narrative verdict in the death of Sgt Steven Roberts.

It was Walker, too, who demanded the release of the damning cockpit video from A-10 pilots who attacked a British convoy in March 2003; he criticised the MoD and the blundering Septics in the process.

And it was Walker who upset the Septics again by inviting the Department of Public Prosecutions and the attorney-general to "consider" a criminal prosecution against the unit responsible for the blunder-inspired shooting of ITN's Terry Lloyd, also at the start of the Iraq war.

Walker criticised the British Army last year for a "cavalier" approach and "serious failures" which led to the death of Lance-Corporal Andrew Craw on a firing range in Iraq. He also exposed "serious failings by the military" when Christopher Maddison, a bootie (Royal Marine), was killed by friendly fire in November last year.

Now that Walker has gone, the MoD and its American equivalents can breathe a sigh of relief.

'Square Basher'

AD NAUSEAM

THE prized sponsorship of *Coronation Street*, currently worth £10m, is up for grabs since the incumbent Cadbury's decided it would not renew its contract this coming October.

One of three companies in the running is Tesco. Yes, that's Tesco, as in the multi-national that is busy turning the nation's few remaining Coronation Streets, with their independent local traders and corner shops, into identikit strip malls. Dev Alahan had better check his lease!

A LETTER arrives from Guideline Daily Amount campaign director Jane Holdsworth in response to *Eye* 1176's criticisms of the GDA labelling advertising campaign. She makes two points, both of which rely on the same type of sleight-of-hand that characterises the GDA labelling scheme.

"We believe that it is most helpful for consumers to be able to see the nutritional contribution of any food in the context of their whole diet." This presumes that consumers have the time and understanding to work out what makes for a balanced diet. Which they don't.

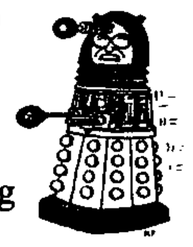
Her other point is that as 40 percent of retail food and drink packs already feature the GDA labels, why push the benefits of the Traffic Light system (green for healthy, red for high salt, fat, sugar etc) now? "An advertising campaign for a scheme that shoppers are unfamiliar with and are unable to easily find in store, is surely more likely to confuse?"

This is a bit like the decorators putting up the wrong wallpaper and then complaining when you ask them to take it down. Just because the big fat coalition of supermarkets and food companies have steamrollered the GDA system into stores before the argument has been won, doesn't make it the right choice.

IT'S ALWAYS fun when a new Guinness campaign arrives on our screens. Fun, because it's a delight to watch a brand harking back to adland's golden age, when TV advertising made an impact and admen could imagine they were creating art – not just something to go on the agency reel while the direct marketing department actually shifted some units.

The new spot uses stop-motion animation to show a pair of hands, which are… but who cares? The real miracle of the new Guinness ad is that, at a time when mass-market TV advertising is almost universally agreed to be a waste of money, Guinness's long-time agency Abbott Mead Vickers persuaded its client's marketing department to make it at all.

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"The BBC is ushering in a new web-based pitch-tracking scheme in an attempt to lower the wall of bureaucracy facing producers looking for a commission from the UK's biggest pubcaster. 'BBC Vision moves fully into multi-platform commissioning this April and capturing every proposal on this website means that we can spend more time developing the very best creative ideas,' explained the studio's director, Jana Bennett. 'And because this system makes it easier to track the progress of proposals, we can ensure there's a level playing field for independents and in-house production as the window of creative competition becomes operational.'"

– Jana Bennett, director of BBC Vision, quoted on C21Media.net

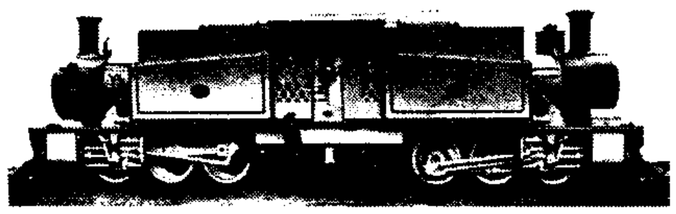
SUPERMODELS

KERBER

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
HORRIBLE SCARY CREATURES, WALKING AROUND, CAUSING TERROR AND FEAR.....
YES..... WE'RE MUCH SAFER OVER HERE!
LONDON FASHION WEEK
DARLING! DARLING! DARLING! MWAH!

The *Private Eye* exhibition at the Cartoon Museum has now closed.

The last winner of the bubble competition was **Ruth McAvinia** from Dublin.



SIGNAL FAILURES

Cutting a good figure

THE rail industry, like the NHS, is managed around statistics, but at least the targets for waiting lists and operations relate to people using the NHS. The railway's task is to deliver trains, not passengers, on time.

Official statistics reflect punctuality at the end of each journey, and one *Eye* reader saw the result at One (National Express's daftly named East Anglia franchise). His train from Norwich was 15 minutes late at Ipswich, where he and many others had to alight because the train would omit the remaining stops to London. They waited up to 45 minutes for the next trains to the omitted stations, but the original train would have been counted punctual by journey's end. Last week his local train was 18 minutes late by Colchester, where it was scheduled to join another train for the run to London. The other train had left on time, four carriages short; the late train was cancelled at Colchester and passengers were further delayed waiting for the next service.

Another reader reports how Arriva Trains Wales stops delayed Aberystwyth-Birmingham services at Wolverhampton, to send them back to Aberystwyth on time. Passengers waiting in Britain's second biggest city can't get to Wolverhampton in time for the Aberystwyth train; the next is two hours later. "Although the train looks as though it's on time, the passengers are not," she said.

South West Trains' statistics have improved with padded timetables, trains leaving early and stops skipped (*Eyes passim*). On a snowy night in late January, passengers on the 1.05am Waterloo-Southampton were put on a bus at Woking because of engineering works. The bus broke down. A taxi arrived and was commandeered by the train driver and guard, who had also been on the bus. A taxi promised for the passengers never appeared; fortunately they could raise the £180 needed for their own taxi to Southampton. SWT unashamedly defended its actions, saying a second train could have been cancelled had the employees not taken the taxi SWT provided. Even in the small hours, train statistics matter more than the risk of customers getting distressed, ill or injured while abandoned beside an icy roundabout.

The traditional way to run a punctual railway is with enough trains, drivers and guards to cover for many of the delays, but that's less and less likely as shareholders demand fatter profits and the government squeezes premium payments from franchisees. Fewer train delays mean lower fines; in the hard-nosed business world of privatised rail, looking after passengers is a sentimental indulgence.

Late-running depot

FIRST Great Western has been economical with the truth when explaining pisspoor performance since its new timetables started in December (*Eyes passim*). It repeatedly attributed the shortage of carriages to inherited maintenance problems; odd, when the trains were the same ones used before December.

The truth has started to emerge. FGW boss Alison Forster has admitted in the staff newspaper *Railnews* that FGW transferred maintenance of local trains from Cardiff to Bristol in December before the new facility was ready. But in her latest public letter of apology she plays down FGW's culpability again, referring vaguely to "difficulties with fleet availability". She boasts, "We are investing £8m in a new maintenance facility in Bristol", without mentioning that the investment should have happened long ago.

P.S. On 3 February an FGW intercity train caught fire at Didcot. Hundreds of passengers were evacuated and other trains delayed or cancelled. On 25 January an FGW intercity train caught fire at Neath, causing severe delays. One train fire may be regarded as a misfortune; two in 10 days looks like carelessness.

All's fare...

THE government's request for a competition inquiry into rolling-stock leasing companies (Roscos) has brought a fortuitous early result; the Roscos won't fund extra carriages for the west-coast mainline because of the uncertainty.

"New" Labour thinks the Roscos are poor value but won't buy new trains itself because that would show up on Gordon Brown's books. The current impasse is perfect because leasing charges won't rise to cover extra carriages... and overcrowding can be an excuse for yet more fare rises.

'Dr B. Ching'

NUCLEAR NEWS

WHEN Alistair Darling, the trade and industry secretary, published a nuclear-friendly energy review last July, he addressed concerns over the expensive mess that more generation could leave behind with the good news that a senior figure would be chosen to develop "arrangements for the costs [of] new build decommissioning and waste management". That man has now been unveiled as none other than Dr Tim Stone, head of "global infrastructure" at consultancy firm KPMG.

The crucial condition on any new nuclear build is that the private operators must be able to pick up the tab for waste. Some doubt this can be guaranteed, and the taxpayer would inevitably end up paying in the long run. But is Stone likely to venture such a conclusion? It would certainly infuriate his KPMG partners, who make millions from the industry. Last year the firm won an award for its work on the sale by British Nuclear Fuels of nuclear building firm Westinghouse to Toshiba. In the judges' words, "KPMG Corporate Finance used its contacts with government and BNFL to market the Japanese energy player". And soon after the energy review, KPMG's top nuclear man, Bob Cormie, told the *Telegraph*: "What we are advocating is lifetime extensions to some of the British Energy [the main UK generator] plants and in between time we start advancing, planning and pre-licensing new reactors."

FERRY SILLY

HAVING spent millions on a tendering process over who should operate the vital subsidised ferry link to the Scottish islands (*Eye* 1176), the Scottish Executive is now faced with a choice of one: the state-owned company that already runs the service.

Western Ferries pulled out of the bidding last year, leaving international shipping firm V.Ships and Scottish Executive-owned Calmac in the running. Now V.Ships has also withdrawn, complaining about constraints in the tender.

The Scottish Executive spent £16m strengthening and restructuring Calmac so it could compete for the route after complaints that its monopoly breached EU regulations. Part of the manoeuvre involved setting up a Guernsey-based company to employ its 800 sea-going staff, thus saving £9m in National Insurance payments and enabling it to compete with rivals. The seafarers' union described the whole process as "a colossal waste of money that could and should have been invested in more and better services".

In theory, the tendering process will have to be run all over again in five years, but shipping journal *Lloyd's List* says there's likely to be even less interest in the job then. As *Lloyd's List* points out, the mess was entirely predictable as it's all happened before – when the EU insisted on a tender for subsidised ferry companies in the Greek islands, which ensure that lifeline services keep running outside the tourist season.

"Today in class you'll be learning about the teaching profession"

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

THE average British 12-year-old now has a share of outdoor playing space the size of a kitchen table, the Welsh Assembly heard during a debate on tightening planning restrictions to protect smaller playing spaces. At present the Sports Council for Wales only has to be consulted when a pitch classed as adult-sized is threatened, while child pitches and smaller casual playing spaces are still vulnerable.

"For every acre of play space in Wales, there are 80 acres of golf club space," said Conservative AM Lisa Francis, who proposed the move, adding that the Children's Play Council estimates there is just 2.3sq m for each child aged 12 and under. The proposed change goes out for consultation this month.

Sadly, smaller playing fields in England will remain under threat – and some larger ones are shrinking. In 2005 Northumberland College was given permission to demolish its old buildings and sell its current site for housing in order to fund a new £60m "learning park", only on strict condition that open space on the site was kept for playing fields.

Last month the college came back to Wansbeck Council saying that to raise enough money for its plans, it needed to increase the number of houses from 250 to 337, swallowing up nearly half the open space. That leaves just a children's playground and 0.45 hectares of grassed area (i.e. about half a football pitch).

Despite petitions from local residents, who pointed out the lack of other open space nearby, Wansbeck's regulatory committee agreed. The college has been required to fund playing pitches and changing room elsewhere – hardly convenient for current residents or those moving into the new housing.

Meanwhile in Prestonpans, in Scotland, the Community Council is considering plans to pave over two school playing fields in order to tackle the town's parking problem. Bonkers!

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

TELOS ANOTHER ONE

NO ONE who followed the Strange Case of Shirley Porter and the Missing Millions was all that surprised when, in August 2006, the disgraced former Conservative leader of Westminster council resurfaced in London, having purchased a £1.5m flat in Mayfair.

Dame Shirley had kept a low profile in Israel for more than a decade as Westminster pursued her, with all the vigour of a sloth on Valium, for the £48m surcharge she owed the taxpayer over the "homes for votes" affair. But, having come to a "full and final" agreement with the council in 2004 to repay just £12.3m, she believed the coast was clear for a return – even though she had clearly lied on oath in 2002 that her total assets amounted to just £300,000. The actual fortune of Shirley and her husband, Sir Leslie Porter, who died in 2005, had been estimated at as much as £69m.

In 2003, after the BBC's *Today* programme revealed a network of secret companies controlled by Porter, the courts froze £34m of family funds held in Guernsey. This forced Porter to come to her agreement with Westminster council. Paul Dimoldenberg, leader of the Labour opposition group, has always argued that the Tory council could, had it and its investigators tried harder, have got a far better deal for the taxpayer.

The Curzon Square flat was bought in the name of a company called Zollikon, with an address in Geneva. Records at the U.S. regulator, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), show that Zollikon is "successor in interest to Sir Leslie Porter". Now that Sir Leslie is dead, of course, the beneficiary of his interests is none other than Dame Shirley.

SEC records also reveal where more than $35m of the Porter fortune is stashed – over and above the money uncovered in Guernsey. In 1993, as Shirley scrambled to hide her assets before the district auditor ruled she should pay a surcharge to compensate the taxpayer for her unlawful gerrymandering, the Porters, via a family company called Toxford, paid $12m for a controlling interest in a profitable but indebted American defence company, the Telos Corporation, based in Ashburn, Virginia. Telos specialises in top secret secure wireless communications software for the U.S. airforce, with 95 per cent of its income coming from U.S. government contracts. According to the SEC, in January this year the Porters' interest in Telos was worth at least $36.5m.

In October 1995 the Porters/Toxford loaned Telos $12m and ever since have received substantial quarterly interest payments, at more than 17 percent, via a number of "Porter entities", including Zollikon. This generous secret income helped keep Shirley in the style to which she was accustomed during her years in exile when she claimed to be broke. And last year it enabled her to buy the Mayfair flat, of which Zollikon is the registered owner.

Although Telos is privately owned, with 80 percent of the shares held by the Porters/Toxford, it has raised capital in the past by the issue of "preferred stock", which is tradeable. But Telos has never paid any dividends on such stock. Shareholders are now demanding to know how the company can afford to pay very large bonuses to its directors, yet cannot pay dividends. Last year a group led by a New York hedge fund called Costa Brava attempted via the U.S. courts to have a receiver appointed to sell the company. The judge turned down the application, saying the investors had failed to prove "specific evidence of fraud, oppression or illegal conduct" that would justify appointing a receiver. The matter is likely to resurface before long in the U.S. courts, however, as the investors seek to get their hands on $80m they claim is owed in unpaid dividends and reclaim millions of dollars in bonuses paid to the directors.

Meanwhile the Labour opposition in Westminster is demanding to know just how Dame Shirley managed to use Telos as a source of income, right under the noses of investigators employed at huge expense by the council to track down her missing millions.

But with the U.S. military's demand for Telos products undiminished, it looks as if Dame Shirley will continue to enjoy a very comfortable retirement.

● DORSET county council is enlisting the aid of the public in attempting to reverse hitherto irresistible forces of nature. The council's *Your Dorset* newspaper enjoins residents, when they go to the beach, not to throw pebbles into the sea, because that is "contributing to the erosion of Dorset's coastline". Rather, strollers should "pick up any suitable stones and throw them – carefully – towards the land". This being the age of elf'n'safety, the council is of course only encouraging "responsible stone throwing". It will be organising "events... in flagged-off areas and issuing official T-shirts to registered throwers".

IOAN THE IDIOT

AS all good political conspirators are aware, only a dimwit sets out his real intentions in an email.

The man in line to be Swansea's next lord mayor, Ioan Richard, is that dimwit. The Independent councillor is a member of the "Swansea administration" (SA) group on the city council, a Lib-Dem-Independent-Tory alliance that has run the city since 2004. In January, however, the four Tories jumped ship, so the SA lost its majority over Labour and Plaid Cymru. Along with the loss of political power went numerous committee chairmanships and their lucrative "special responsibility allowances" – much to the chagrin of Cllr Richard.

So he came up with a "cunning plan" for "trench warfare" – and foolishly put it in an email to colleagues. At the start of every council committee meeting, he wrote, SA members should force an election for the committee's chairmanship, so that if any of their opponents were absent through "ill health" or "family funerals" the SA could temporarily win back the more highly paid positions.

"If we succeed only once in five goes," he wrote, "we will get 20 percent of their Special Responsibility Allowance e.g. 20 percent of a Chair's £9,000 is £1,800 – an amount not to be scoffed at, and it will really inconvenience the other lot and annoy them enormously... I have already discussed it with several colleagues. Most think it's a brilliant idea, but a few thought it childish or not worth it... If I don't do this I'm going to go back part-time casual supply teaching for £140 per day for a five-hour day... if I cannot claw back some of my allowance I will have to get some extra money from somewhere."

Judging by the public reaction following the leaking of Cllr Richard's email, it looks as if the council's loss will shortly be the children of Swansea's gain.

"We've taken on five new members of staff"

● WARNINGS that inhabitants of a new housing development might be blown up in their homes have fallen on deaf ears in the London borough of Tower Hamlets.

The council gave permission to developer Neptune Group to build 14 homes in Bethnal Green in November, even though the site is adjacent to National Grid gasholders and the Health and Safety Executive had warned against the project. The HSE has now asked communities and local government secretary Ruth Kelly to overturn the planning permission. The HSE says it has a "legal obligation to protect the public from the effects of major hazards".

If Kelly stops the development, Tower Hamlets will, of course, be open to a compensation claim from Neptune.

NAZ WORK

HATS OFF to Labour councillor Naz Sarkar, "cabinet member for arts and culture" at Waltham Forest council. The council is slashing opening hours at the borough's William Morris Gallery in order to save the authority £56,000 a year as part of a £6.8m cuts package. Cllr Sarkar explains that, although the gallery will now only be open at weekends, that will, in fact, make it "more accessible" to the public, not less. Phew!

The gallery, in Water House, Morris's family home for eight years in the 1850s, is home to the Brangwyn gift, Britain's foremost "arts and crafts" collection, including hundreds of works by Morris. Morris fans fear that the cuts presage the eventual closure of the museum – one of the few cultural high spots in the benighted borough – and the collection's removal to the V&A.

It is not all bad news. Budget constraints are not so tight that councillors have been unable to award themselves large increases in their own pay. Council leader Clyde Loakes's allowance, for example, is going up from a measly £17,000 to a handsome £50,000 a year.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

PEOPLE JUST HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO COMPLETE A DECENT CV...
THEY FORGET IT'S THEIR PASSPORT TO A BETTER JOB! THAT'S WHY HELPING OUT AT THE LOCAL 6TH FORM COLLEGE HAS BEEN SO REWARDING. I FEEL WE'RE REALLY MAKING A DIFFERENCE...
SO HOW DO YOU SEE "PODCAST HOSTING" HELPING YOU AS A MECHANIC'S APPRENTICE?
CV

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE Victoria & Albert Museum can still boast what was the first museum restaurant in the world, dating from the 1860s. On the north side of the courtyard are three splendid rooms designed for the refreshment of visitors: the Gamble Room, entirely clad with washable, colourful decorative ceramic and tile by James Gamble; the Grill Room, decorated with blue and white tiles to designs by the painter Edward Poynter; and the Green Dining Room, the first public commission given to Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. – that is, the firm founded by the great William Morris.

Having survived the violent turn of taste against the Victorians, these rooms have been accessible in recent decades. And now you can have a cup of tea or lunch in them – which is good.

As part of the exciting, ongoing transformation of the interiors by modish, cutting-edge designers intended to drag the poor old V&A into the 20th century – like converting the Mediaeval gallery opposite the entrance into a shop – the galleries between the old refreshment rooms and the courtyard garden have been made into the museum's new Café. In a bold and exciting act of patronage, the design was entrusted to MUMA (McInnes Usher McKnight Architects), "a young architectural practice", working with Benugo, "the caterers and specialist consultants", and the museum promised us that it would be "contemporary, elegant and utilitarian". Well, the result is certainly utilitarian as it rather resembles a bright hospital canteen. Naturally everything is minimalist, and, as no attempt was of course made to harmonise with the old refreshment rooms, the walls are relentlessly pale grey. The contrast with the rich golden yellows of the Gamble Room and the subtle greens of the Morris Room is painful. Not that visitors who wander in with their trays are invited to appreciate these interiors, as they are not told that there is anything special about them. So much for outreach – and, for that matter, design.

Although we were assured the new Café would be "exciting, accessible and relaxing", visitors may well find they have to queue for longer as the several counters are smaller than those in the old restaurant – that congenial and practical space in the Henry Cole Wing in which much timber is used. Although created as recently as 1983 by Sir Roy Strong (generating some controversy), this will now be ripped out and the space made into offices. At a time when museum budgets are everywhere being slashed as all available arts funding is sucked into the insatiable maw of that colossal national catastrophe, the Olympic Games, and when the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow is threatened with further restricted opening hours and the loss of its expert curatorial staff to save a mere £56,000 a year (see Rotten Boroughs), what all this posturing design incompetence has actually cost the V&A perhaps doesn't bear thinking about.

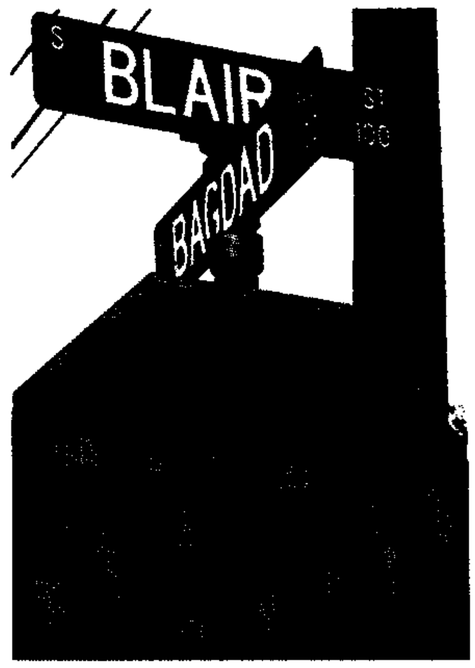
Dare I say it? – Come back Sir Roy, all is forgiven?

NOBLESSE OBLIGE. Zetland, from which Lawrence Dundas, 4th Marquess, takes his title, is an ancient Nordic name for that part of the North Yorkshire coast east of Middlesborough. Originally Scots, the Dundases bought land around Redcar and Marske in the 18th century and one of Lord Zetland's predecessors prevented the dunes along the coast, known as The Stray, between Redcar and Saltburn, from being built on. The present Lord Zetland has different priorities, however. He has just resumed being chairman of Redcar Racecourse after a boardroom coup. He had been chairman before but resigned in 2000 to pursue his £100m scheme to move the racecourse two miles south to a 537-acre site he owns at Dunsdale Farm, near Guisborough. Now back in the saddle, he has announced a £4.3m feasibility study into the future of the racecourse. This will be paid for by Voltigeur International, the company he set up to build the new racecourse, together with new facilities closely connected with horse racing such as a leisure centre, hotel and casino.

Redcar Racecourse has been going since 1872. It occupies a large open site close to the town centre, so spectators can easily walk there. But such land is valuable of course – even in Redcar – and last year the board proposed a £3.5m deal with George Wimpey to build 138 flats on racecourse land – a deal that involved altering the alignment of the course to make the land available. This was a scheme which secured planning permission from Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council and which Lord Zetland at first supported, but then opposed. Much better, of course, to move the racecourse altogether, then the whole vast site can be built over and so make many more millions.

Quite why Redcar & Cleveland Council is in favour of moving the racecourse is hard to understand. This supine authority, controlled by the Liberal Democrats, has recently expressed its commitment to combating climate change. Yet abandoning the open, green, town centre site – which visitors can reach easily on foot and by public transport – in favour of a new development in open country that will only be accessible by car is, surely, not only stupid but in nobody's interest these days – except Lord Zetland's, of course.

'Piloti'



I-SPY

Austin, Texas

Submitted by Richard Bagnall.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE European Commission earned headlines last week for announcing that carmakers would have to make vehicle engines more fuel efficient, thus cutting emissions. It was all good news, said the Commission: European manufacturers will develop world-beating technology, and lower fuel costs will compensate for vehicle price hikes.

The Commission made less of a fanfare, however, about the higher manufacturing costs. Unusually, no impact assessment was published with the proposals. Commission spokesmen deflected questions, saying a full impact assessment would be carried out in due course.

This was disingenuous. The *Eye* has established that there have already been not one but two draft studies by Commission services - Industry and Environment. They reached different conclusions; indeed, the proposals were delayed for two weeks due to a quarrel between the commissioners involved, Günter Verhuegen for Industry and stubborn Stavros Dimas for Environment.

Dimas's study – it does not have official "impact assessment" status – found that the proposals could lead to job cuts and an acceleration in the shift of production out of the EU, especially for manufacturers of small and medium-sized cars. The countries most affected would be Spain and the UK.

How the Commission will approach the thorny question of job cuts when it prepares the full impact assessment, as promised by the spokesmen, remains to be seen. In the meantime, it refuses to release the draft studies. As one official told the *Eye*, "we can't release a document that doesn't exist officially".

MORE conscientious members of the European Parliament are complaining that they don't have enough to do.

This year has been marked by a notable lack of initiatives from the Commission for MEPs to get their teeth into. The reason, it seems, is that a "better regulation" drive, launched by Commission president José Manuel Barroso in 2005, is starting to bite. In many areas, "better regulation" has meant "no regulation" – leading one MEP to ask, apparently without irony, "What am I doing wasting my time in Brussels?"

Some MEPs, however, might welcome this approach, especially those who rail against the Brussels gravy train. Robert Kilroy-Silk spent the first two-and-a-half years of his European mandate cultivating an air of mystery about what exactly he was doing. He sat on no committees, authored no reports, and last made a speech in plenary in October 2005. The latest news on his MEP website dates from 2004. And all this for an annual salary of £60,000 and expenses of up to £100,000. Gravy train indeed!

Now, however, as the next European elections edge just that little bit closer, Kilroy-Silk has become a member of the Parliament's education and culture committee. The committee, which deals among other things with broadcasting regulation, will no doubt benefit greatly from the orange one's chat show expertise!

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

From their early extreme drunkenness and violence ... the excrement and body fluids phase... their flirtation with fascism... the blasphemy and gay fetishist imagery...
TATE MODERN
GILBERT AND GEORGE
MAJOR EXHIBITION
They're an inspiration to us all!

PLAYING THE GAMES

IT'S NOT just the costs of preparing for the 2012 Olympics that have been misrepresented (see last *Eye*). So have the shaky finances for staging a Games that was supposed to be self-financing – raising the prospect of further shortfalls to be paid for by somebody.

In 2002 the government's favourite sports consultant Arup said that income from the Games would be £610m, leaving a surplus of £79m after costs of £531m. That was "a massive boost for the bid's backers", in the words of its public affairs boss Mike Lee in his book *Race for London 2012 – the Inside Story of How London Won the Bid*. The sceptics in government were duly won round – except that the figures were pie in the sky.

Before the bid was finalised a July 2004 PricewaterhouseCoopers report on costs, obtained by the *Eye* under the Freedom of Information Act, predicted it would actually cost £1.96bn to run the Games at 2004 prices. The consultants also estimated that, even on optimistic assumptions about commercial and public interest in the Games, only £1.41bn could be expected in revenue from sponsorship, tickets etc – leaving a thumping £550m shortfall.

By the time the bid was submitted to the International Olympic Committee soon afterwards, however, the costs of staging the event had magically shrunk to £1.54bn, while the anticipated income had risen to, yep, £1.54bn. Hey presto! The public and the IOC worthies who would choose the winning city could be told that the books balanced.

The London Organising Committee claims that the figures quoted by PwC included some unspecified amounts that are now within the £2.375bn public funding package for preparing for the Games. But that package was itself already known to be inadequate even when the bid was submitted (see last *Eye*).

The fact that damning independent estimates for the costs of preparing and staging the Games were dramatically adjusted without explanation just before submitting the bid – giving an impression of affordability and financial balance that is now falling apart – was somehow overlooked in recent reports from both the National Audit Office and Parliament's Culture and Sport committee. Maybe fiddling the figures to win people round is all part of the Olympic dream.

NEWSFAX, the firm that prints the *Guardian*, the *Sun* and others, has been forced to up sticks as its east London plant is in the way of the Olympic Park.

After fears that the already struggling firm might be forced to shut altogether – with a loss of 350 jobs on the site – MPs on the all-party print group and the Amicus union parliamentary group lobbied Olympic bosses for help with an expensive move and new printing presses. In May 2006, the London Development Agency dished out £17m.

With a new site in Dagenham and new machinery, however, Newsfax finds it suddenly doesn't need quite so many expensive employees. In December, staff were sent letters warning of potential redundancy – at least 41 jobs are to go. A voluntary redundancy process is now under way, with the threat of compulsory job losses looming.

Leyton and Wanstead MP Harry Cohen has written to Olympics minister Tessa Jowell asking for the government to intervene. "Public money should be used to help pave the way for the Olympics and to save jobs," he said. "However I don't believe so much public money should be used to boost the assets of a private firm if that firm is going to use these new assets to make people redundant."

Letters

Private Eye

'Words event'

Sir,

Your item headed "Under the Weather" on snow stopping trains (Signal Failures, 1177) has not caught up with modern forecaster-speak, where the talk is now of "weather events".

A BBC Radio 4 forecaster recently told us: "The potential is certainly there for a significant snowfall event." (i.e. It might snow heavily.)

And sure enough, once it had snowed, another Radio 4 forecaster said: "Our expected major snow event is underway in Wales." (It is snowing in Wales.)

MICHAEL DUGGAN,

London W12.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

To allay fears of the spread of avian flu by migrating birds, please publish any photos that you may have of either Eastern European or Asian birds in close contact with healthy and fearless humans so that we can all rest easily.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN FINEGAN,

Co. Cavan, Ireland.

Scrubs slip

Sir,

May I correct an error in my letter (1175) about brutality at Wormwood Scrubs prison that was carried forward into "Cover up at the Scrubs" (1177).

Whereas Jim Perriss, Governor in charge for much of the time that the brutality persisted, was promoted to a Prison Service area manager post, it was not one that entailed oversight of Wormwood Scrubs.

Many apologies.

Yours faithfully,
PETER QUINN,

Helperby, N. Yorkshire.

Footballs

Sir,

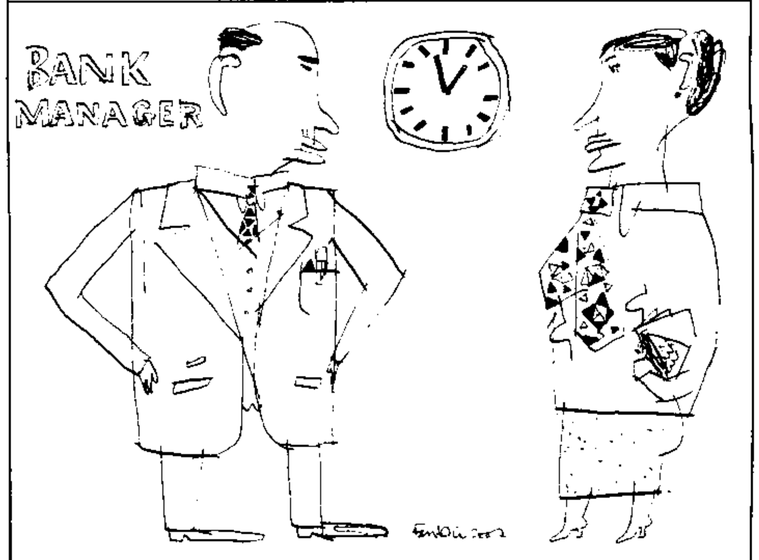
Re: "In Memoriam Grandstand" (Eye 1177).

It is laughable – and possibly actionable – to suggest that Stirling Albion would fail to score while at the same time shipping 17½ goals to E.J. Thribb's XI. A quick glance at the current Scottish Second Division table would have shown you that we are tucked in nicely in second place. Such a result might have been possible had our excellent young manager Allan Moore succeeded in signing own-goal specialist Bertie Pevsner in the January transfer window, but alas he was lured to Neasden by the promise of late-night shopping and lucrative sponsorship deals (Standard Lite). You must also be aware that we hold the record for the greatest number of goals in a senior game in the 20th century – 20-0 v. Selkirk in 1984.

Yours with the boys in red-and-white,
CRAWFORD LOGAN,

Stirling.

Scenes You Seldom See



"We're always busy at lunchtime. Tell all the cashiers to take their break later"

Cosmic error

Sir,

You are right. Back in 1997, I wrote a lot about Comet Hale Bopp but I failed to connect it to Princess Diana or to predict her death in any way. The day she died, though, I had a horrible, Homer Simpson moment. The comet! Doh!

Even on my infamous pilgrimage to the East, I met nobody who pointed out that comets are invariably bad news for the monarchy. Perhaps they thought it too obvious to mention.

In my defence, m'lud, may I say that Western astrological tradition is shockingly short of material about how to read these signs in the sky. Most of my colleagues had just ignored the comet completely.

At least I went and talked to some mystics. They said it meant a mass awakening. I read this as a quantum leap in cosmic consciousness. It turned out to mean millions of Diana fans getting a rude awakening.

Oh well. Hindsight is 20/20. I missed the obvious. You can have that. You can't though have the one about me predicting a day of judgement in 1999. There, you just took my words out of context and twisted the meaning. What a cheap tabloid trick. How could you stoop so low?

JONATHAN CAINER,

The Daily Mail.

P.S. I am not goblin-faced. I am kindly-old-troll-faced.

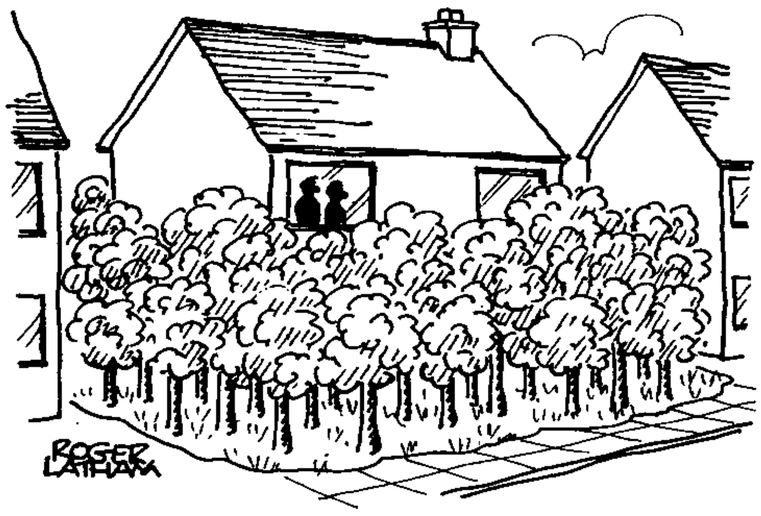
LUVVIES

"I'm OK to live with. I've had the same nanny for six years – that's a testament."
PATSY KENSIT

Submitted by Matt Cooper.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"Sorry, but I'm not signing a pre-nup"



"We plant a tree every time we fly!"

First shall be last

Sir,

I was interested to read about David Miliband's confusion over the history of his own Labour Party (Eye 1176), especially as he graduated with a First in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from my alma mater, Corpus Christi, Oxford. I remember a decade ago taking the (compulsory) foundation course in British politics. The subject of my first essay and tutorial? The origins of the British Labour Party!

Sadly I only got a "bog-standard" 2.1.

Keep up the good work,
DAVID SILKE,

Via email.

Holy wrong

Sir,

With regards to Jamie Robertson's most gallant and Christian acceptance of my sexuality (Letters, Eye 1177).

May I now assume that all I need to do is become celibate, then I can marry my partner of 10 years in a church and adopt some of those spare children that you heterosexuals don't seem to want?

No, thought not.

What a waste of ink.

Yours,
PAUL WEBSTER,

London.

Tolkien rubbish

Sir,

As a Tolkien nerd, I feel I must take issue with Oak Bailey's letter (Eye 1177) asserting that Jackiey "Jade's Mum" Budden "does not look like an Orc, she looks like an Urak (sic) Hai". Although the Peter Jackson films from which your picture was drawn do not make this clear, the Uruk-Hai in Tolkien's Middle-earth are in fact merely a superior strain or Orc, rather than a distinct species. In fact, the Black Speech name "Uruk-Hai" simply translates as "Ork-folk".

I do feel a little low for correcting a 12-year-old, but I have no intention of getting out more.

Yours sincerely,
HARRY SNOOK (AGED 24).

Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Prism Data Cabinets: Delivering Enclosure Solutions" – *cabinets*

"Avery: providing innovative decorating, information transfer and bonding solutions that enable our customers' success." – *sticky labels*

"Uniform Solutions: Schoolwear for the children of today" – *school uniforms*

"Trafficmaster Plc: the leading provider of intelligent driving solutions" – *speed cameras*

"Acoustic Solutions Guitar Mega Pack" – *electric guitar*

All submitted by readers

"I used to tour the restaurants, selling red roses for the ladies, but people aren't that romantic any more"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

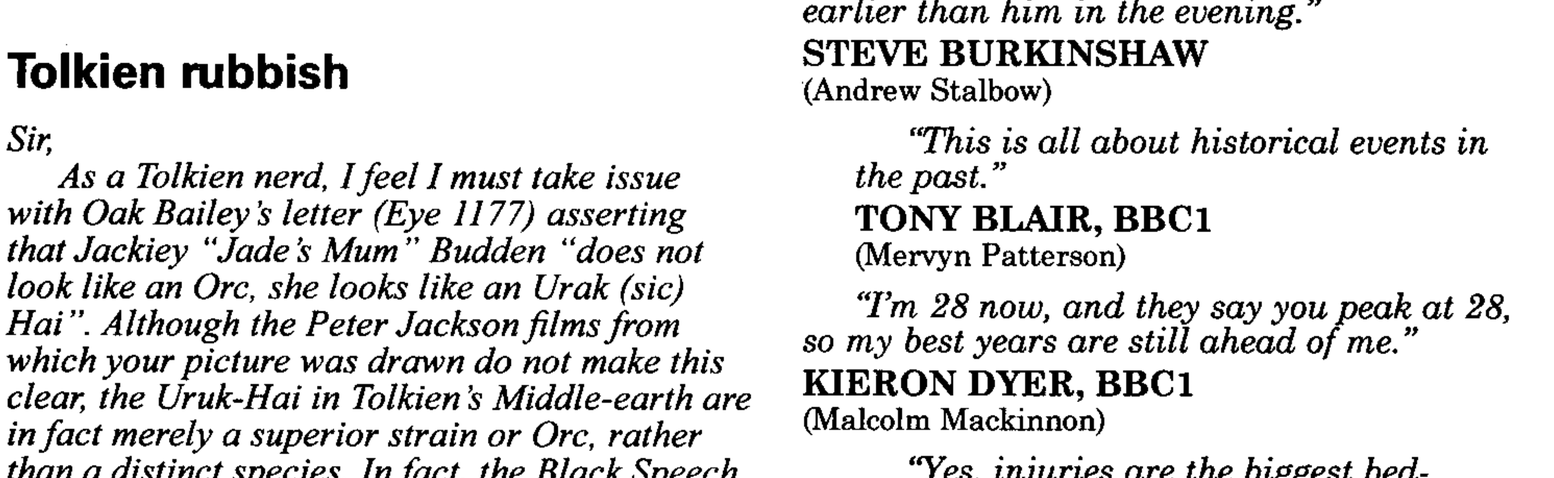
"He [Sir Alex Ferguson] is such a hard worker – even at his age I bet there's no one in before him in the morning and no one leaves earlier than him in the evening."
STEVE BURKINSHAW
(Andrew Stalbow)

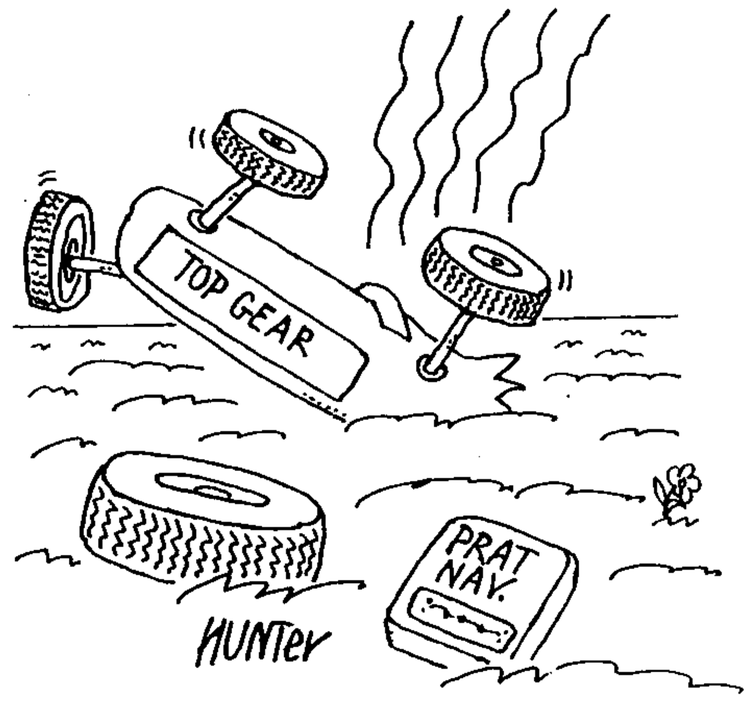
"This is all about historical events in the past."
TONY BLAIR, BBC1
(Mervyn Patterson)

"I'm 28 now, and they say you peak at 28, so my best years are still ahead of me."
KIERON DYER, BBC1
(Malcolm Mackinnon)

"Yes, injuries are the biggest bed-bug..."
STEVE McLAREN, Radio 2
(Ian Gilvear)

"It's like he's got velvet gloves on his feet..."
IAN DOWIE, BBC1
(Bob Davies)





Pedants' Corner

Sir,

With reference to Latin For Beginners (Eye 1177), I recall that the late Dudley Moore conjugated the verb Tesco on a chat show, possibly Clive Anderson. According to Moore, the third person plural was Tescunt not Tescant. At the time Moore was doing a series of advertisements for Tesco who, I believe, dropped him from their campaign.

Yours faithfully,
PAUL MANSKI,

Via email.

Sir,

Regarding the excellent cartoon in issue 1177 on the plus side of global warming, I feel constrained to point out that the gas methane is in fact heavier than air, and as a result the genetically modified sheep would not require tethers to secure them to the ground. Being a professional diver I know about gases and stuff, and before anybody asks, yes I do have a life, just not as you know it, Jim.

ROGER STOTT,

Via email.

Sir,

Bit confused this week. So critical of the BBC that I thought I was reading the Times. Yes, the BBC isn't perfect but it is still the best broadcasting company in the world.

Otherwise carry on the good work.

EMILY HALL,

Via email.

Sir,

May I make so bold as to out-pedant Sonia May (Pedants' Paradise, Eye 1177)? Prince Charles is the Heir Apparent, i.e. if Brenda falls off the perch tomorrow (quod avertat Deus!) he will become King. Prince William is the Heir Presumptive, and in the event of the aforementioned sad scenario he moves up to take Charles's place as Heir Apparent. (Assuming Prince William has no legitimate offspring at that time, the Heir Presumptive will be Prince Harry, but that's an altogether different can of worms!)

It is, therefore, not inaccurate to describe Prince William as "heir to the throne" (especially with a lower-case 'h') since that is, precisely, his destiny. Poor sod.

Yours faithfully,
COLIN M. JAMES,

Bournemouth.

Sir,

Re. Lord Linley/Tom Jones "Lookalike" (1177), as the former's father was Anthony Armstrong-JONES, perhaps they are indeed related?!

Yours,
ENA BRIATE-NEWT,

Hove.

Letter from **Rio de Janeiro**

from Our Own Correspondent

A MAN bounces past with eight metre-long sea-sponges attached to his head. A glittering silver dress in the crowd is made of ring-pulls from cans. Another outfit is concocted entirely from drink straws.

This is carnival in Brazil street-style – inventive, costs nothing to join and it's sponsorship-free. In fact, the only logos you'll see are from people using bar table parasols as umbrellas against either the sun or the rain.

São Luiz do Paraitinga is a town of just 10,000 inhabitants that has gone back to carnival's roots. Its playful "carnaval da rua" features the screaming mania of the "uga-uga" bloco, who have no instruments, no songs, wear only cave*man-style animal* skins and shout "uga-uga" at anyone who notices them. A small-scale street event in the country's north-east, it throws up some excellent comedy blocos. There's "E Haja Prazer, Sem Camisinha, Não Entra" (Pleased To Meet You, Without A Condom, You Are Not Coming In), a bloco made up of education and health workers; and "Mamãe, Eu Quero Mamae" (Mummy, I Want My Mummy), a bloco from the maternity hospital in Pernambuco. And the Bloco do Alegre (Happy Block) are in-patients and workers at a psychiatric hospital.

It's all a million miles from the commercial, choreographed spectacular in Rio de Janeiro, where plane-loads of punters descend at this time of year, every year, and jam into a purpose-built kilometre-long Sambadrome, comfortably protected from the never-ending drug war by 500 soldiers drafted from the Brazilian army. Jonny Gringo can come and go without even realising he was dancing in the middle of a war zone.

In an attempt to make the penny drop, a group of friends has just set up the media-savvy and tourist-busting Rio Body Count website, which logged 70 murders in its first six days – a little below the average of 18 a day over the past twenty years.

The favela-dwellers, who make up one in four of Rio's population, are branded as "suspected drug traffickers" when they are gunned down daily by Rio's crack – or dope, or coke - police squad, BOPE, which shares the spoils of drugs and guns.

It can get dark. Bus burning is so common it is regarded as traffic news, but usually the gangs warn passengers to get out first. The one that didn't, when eight people died, got our President to pull out the T-word - *Terraristas!* - last month.

It can get darkly comic too. A cinematic drama doc based on two whistleblowing BOPErs is being filmed in Rio at the moment. The production team got special dispensation to have 90 automotic weapons on the set – until they were swiftly nicked by a nearby crew from the Red Command faction.

But I digress. The super-santised TV Globo spectacular (the one familiar to foreigners, all green feather bowers and spectacular floats) is screened with so many morphed logos of mobile phone companies and beer ads it's difficult to make out the *sambistas*. And to stretch out the good ship Carnival throughout the year, city chiefs have just forked out $35m to create a samba theme park, dubbed the Disneyland of Carnival, where out-of-season tourists can watch poor imitations of the real thing. Priced-out and pissed off local *cariocas* predict that the "City of Samba will turn into Cemetery of Samba". The spirit-crushing 92,000sq m fun zone was built in an old industrial district on the very spot where the first samba was played by slaves brought from Africa.

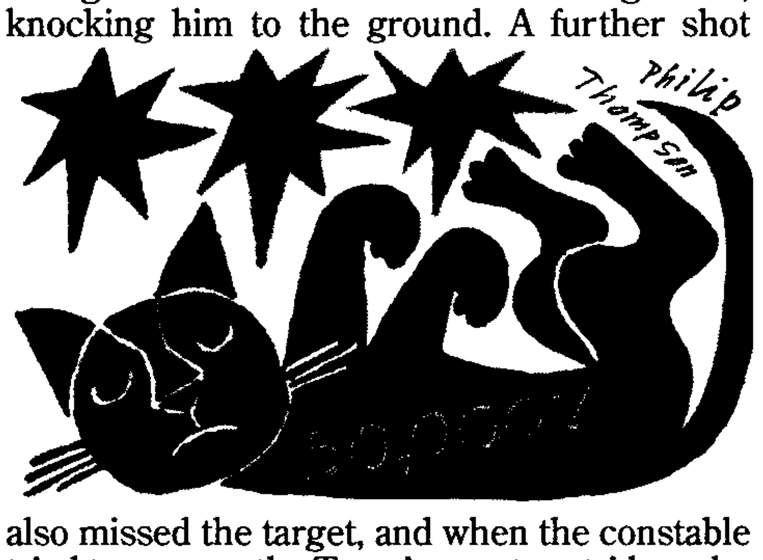
Tourism is booming despite deaths and a weak dollar, and Rio attracts 1.8 million foreign tourists a year in an industry worth $4bn annually. We are hosting Latin America's version of the Olympics, the Pan-American Games, in July, when Rio will be blessed with a troop surge bringing army numbers to 6,000. This one is going to run and run.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "When the constable arrived at the house," Detective Inspector Bernie Hollewand told a press conference in Auckland, "he found a heated domestic dispute taking place between a husband, his wife, and their teenage son. After remonstrations with the couple proved futile, he decided to use his Taser weapon to disable the man. But unfortunately these electronic stun guns are still in the trial stages among frontline police in Auckland and Wellington. They're a little wobbly, and we occasionally experience problems with them.

"His first 50,000 volt shot from the Taser missed the husband and hit the cat, killing it outright. The second hit the teenage son, knocking him to the ground. A further shot



also missed the target, and when the constable tried to remove the Taser's spent cartridges, he forgot to wait for the five-second discharge cycle to complete, and inadvertently blasted himself with another 50,000 volts. When he had recovered and reloaded, he fired two further shots, both of which hit the ceiling. At this point he abandoned the Taser, and took out his pepper spray in another attempt to disable the husband. Unfortunately, this too missed its target, and instead disabled the couple's twenty-one-year-old daughter who had just entered the room. Luckily, at this point the husband decided to give himself up, and an arrest was made." *(Otago Daily Times, 18-19/11/06. Spotter: Derek N. Hartley)*

– ● –

● *Ashes to Portraits is a unique, one-of-a-kind concept. We use a combination of your loved one's cremated ashes and a special mixture of oil paint to create a portrait of your loved one that will last for many generations! The beautiful and unique portrait will be a forever keepsake of your loved one. It is a way to deal with feelings of loss and sadness. Our professional artist works on each portrait individually to make a painting that will mean the world to you and your family! We also do portraits of your beloved pet using their cremated ashes.*

Requirements. Keep the full amount of ashes in the same container that was given to you. Do not ship the ashes in an urn. We will not be using all of the cremains, and will send you back the remaining ashes at the time we ship the portrait. Send one photograph of the person or pet which the portrait will be based on. If there are two people in the photograph, please specify which person is to be painted.

What we do. Working from both a photo of your loved one and some of their ashes, we bring them to life in a way no one else can!

What a great way to keep them alive in your visual memory!

A great painting to pass on for many generations!

A wonderfully unique conversation starter!

Something very special and meaningful to do with your loved one's cremated ashes.

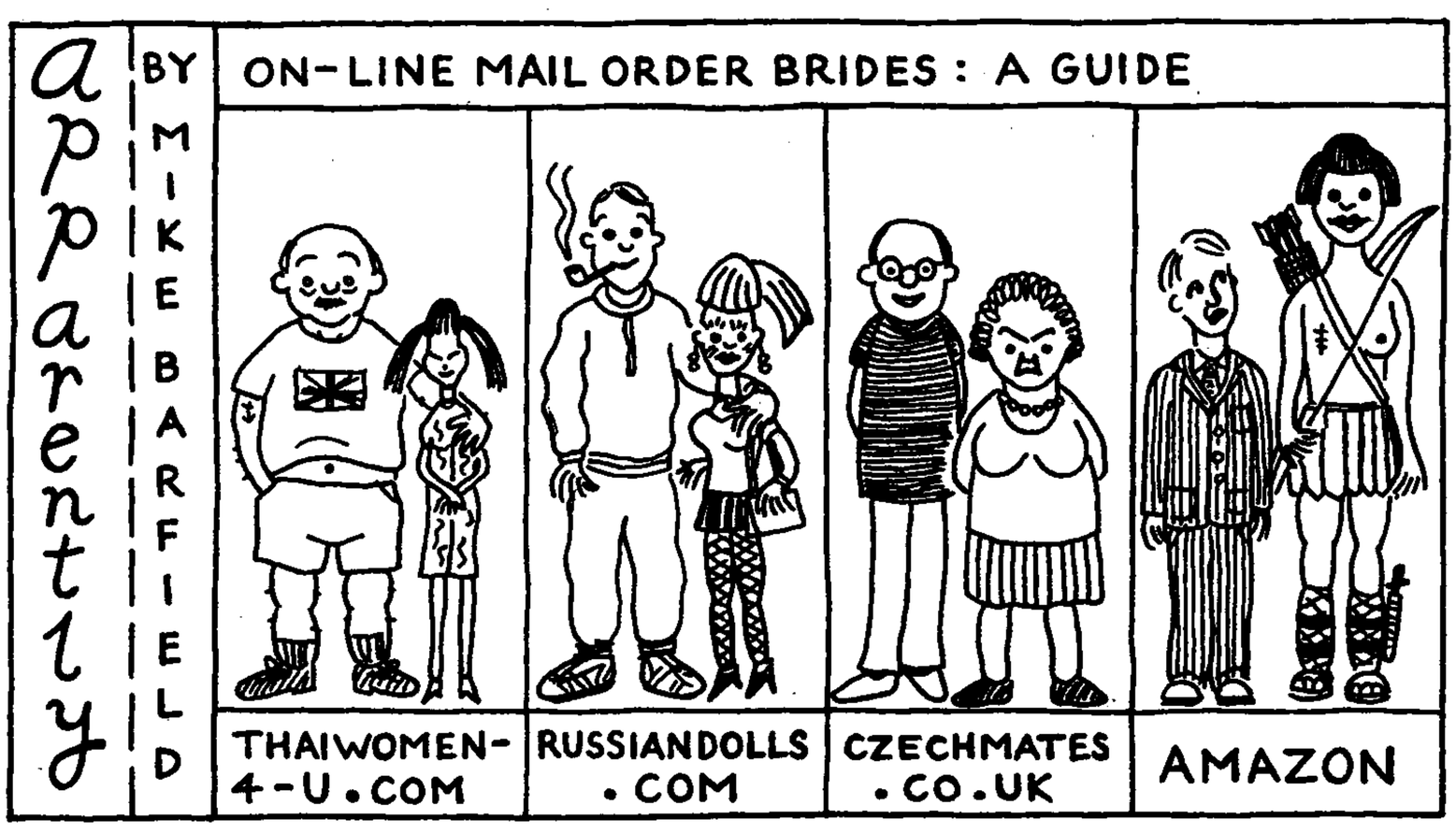
Yes. It's tasteful!

Ashes to Portraits, 1807 N. Franklin Ave., Flint MI 48506 USA. (Ashes To Portraits advertisement. Spotter: Peter Owen)

– ● –

● "Ratko and I were drinking rakia with our girlfriends," Alexander Tadic told reporters in Uzice (southwest Serbia), "when a sword swallower came on television. We began arguing about whether it was real or a trick, and Ratko swore that he could do it too. We challenged him, so he stood up and began swallowing everything we handed to him. It was amazing. He swallowed a knife with an eight-inch blade, then eight nails, two spoons, several clothes pegs, everything we gave him just disappeared. We thought it was an act, and that he was hiding them in his pockets or something, but then he collapsed, and we realised something was wrong."

Speaking later at the Uzice city hospital, Dr Maja Gulan said that "Ratko Dankovic has been very lucky. After a five-hour operation, we have managed to remove all the items, and despite all the sharp metal objects he had swallowed, he has not significantly injured his stomach or intestines." However, Ratko's girlfriend thought some of the smaller metal items might still be inside her boyfriend, and was concerned that "he might be stopped by the airport metal detector when we go on holiday next month." *(Nursing in Practice, September/October 2006. Spotter: Miss Marie-Therese Ryan)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And I'm really getting a bit fed up with people queuing up outside the vicarage saying that they've come to wish me "goodbye".

Not to mention PC Yates, who despite everything I've said in the past few weeks, still persists in lurking around in the shrubbery waving a pair of handcuffs at me and shouting "It's a Blair cop!" – which, incidentally, is neither funny nor clever.

And all the time I'm trying to get on with my job, with all the hundreds of tasks that being vicar of this parish involves.

Just look at my diary for today:

10.15 Coffee with the Women's Group, led by Mrs Blears.

11.00 Mr Miliband comes in to discuss his plans for a parish global warming initiative.

11.01 Visit to St Albion's Kwikfit Academy to launch our exciting new school curriculum initiative, "Let's Learn Mandarin".

12.00 Important on-site meeting with Mrs Jowell to discuss the plans for our new "Super-Casino" (formerly the South Transept), including the positioning of 180 slot machines, 24 crap tables, 3 roulette wheels, and a central "Counselling Point", where customers can seek help for their gambling addiction.

I could go on all day, but, goodness me, how can I be expected to cope with a busy schedule like this, and all these important meetings which are so vital to the future of the parish, when all I ever hear from parishioners (and even, I fear, not a few members of the PCC) is them asking me when I am going to "clear my desk" and leave the vicarage for ever!

Hey, what sort of gratitude is that, for all the hard work I've put in over the past ten years of dedicated service to St Albion's?

Ten years in which I've achieved so much – and yet there is still so much more that I could do, if only people could just leave me alone to get on with it!

How can I possibly be expected to do my job, when everyone thinks I should give it up!

Only last Saturday, when I was out buying some herbal tranquilisers for Cherie (she's feeling the strain a bit too, so I hope that makes some of you feel guilty!), our friend in Tesco leaped out from behind the dispay of "Dr Who Easter Eggs" to say "I hope you managed to delete all those emails on your hard drive, vicar, ha ha ha".

I said that I had no idea what he was talking about, and that I leave all that kind of thing to Miss Turner and Mr Levy.

But he obviously didn't hear me, as he had somehow tripped over my trolley and was extricating himself from under a pile of beetroot in the new "Taste of Warsaw Polish Delicacy aisle".

Which brings me to my fourth point. I am getting even more fed up with people saying that I look very odd these days and that I have a strange glint in my eye! I know what they're hinting at! I know what all these people are trying to say! Oh yes, I can see through their little games. Gordon and the rest of them!

They think I'm going mad! Mad! Mad! Do you hear me? Me, the Vicar!

Can you imagine anything less likely than that I, of all people, should go off his rocker!

Me, the most successful vicar in the history of Christendom, the Saviour of the World, the man who abolished slavery, who discovered America and invented the internet!

Me, the first British Time Lord ever to rule over the Galaxy!

Me, the seventh Avatar of the great God Zurg, in whom all things are made new!

Me, brighter than a thousand suns, from whom Kali cringes. I who have become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds!

I, who needs to go and have a lie down!

(Memo to the Editor: if you change a word of this very important and historic document, you will be cursed through all Eternity.)

Signed, in his own blood,

Tony

Businessmen's Fellowship Group

Mr Goldsmith gave a very interesting talk under the title "Learning To Respect Our Differences", in which he spoke about the need to understand the way in which cultures other than our own look at doing business. He gave as an example the old Saudi Arabian custom of asking for large amounts of money in brown envelopes when completing any major business transaction.

"To us, with our Western point of view," said Mr Goldsmith, "this might be described as bribery and corruption." But it was important, he explained, not to take such a narrow view. "The custom of *baksheesh*," he said, "was an ancient one, dating back many centuries, to the time of the Prophet himself, as an expression of hospitality and mutual respect between the parties. From the Saudi point of view, it would have been corrupt not to have offered the *bakhanda*."

Mrs Jowell provided suitably non-alcoholic beverages at the end of the talk, out of respect for our Saudi colleagues who had kindly sponsored the meeting.

Great Honour For The Vicar!!!

The major event of the week has been the visit to the parish of one of the most admired women of our time – Mother Shilpa of Calcutta, whose dignity and courage have so impressed the whole world. And this week she graciously agreed to pose for pictures with your vicar!!!

Mother Shilpa's visit began with a tour of the slums *(Surely 'vicarage'? Ed.)*, when she kindly agreed to meet several members of the PCC. I have to say, some of them were rather star-struck, asking for her autograph, which they explained was not for their children but for themselves. Said Mr Straw afterwards, "She is even more beautiful than my friend Sister Condy".

After her tour of the vicarage, Mother Shilpa told the St Albion's Courier, "I think your vicar is really sweet and I can't think why everyone wants to kick him out of the vicarage!". Well put, Shilpa, and how "sweet" of you to say it! T.B.

Mr Vaz welcomes Ms Shilpa to the parish

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Ian Richardson, actor

So. Farewell
Then Ian
Richardson –

TV's Francis
Urquhart.

"You may
Say that.
But I couldn't
Possibly comment."

That was
Your catchphrase
In *House of Cards*.

They are calling you
A very
Fine actor.

They may say
That.

But I cannot
Possibly comment

Because I
Never watched it.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

Did you find this poem moving? Join the debate on the Thribb-blog at www.e-catchphrase.co.uk

Tonight's TV

Pothead Revisited

(UK Old 9pm)

ANOTHER chance to see the classic saga of bright young things living it up among the dreaming spires of Oxford. In tonight's episode gilded youth David and his inseparable companion Boris decide to trash the Golden Curry House and push an oik off Magdalen Bridge. But later they are arrested by Inspector Morse for possession of cannabis.

Eye rating: Zzzzzzz

NORFOLK SKIES DARKENED AS FURNACES BURN

by **Lunchtime O'Bootiful**

PILLARS of smoke over a mile high filled the Norfolk skies today, as lorry-load after lorry-load of doomed books headed for the blazing incinerators working round the clock to destroy what they are calling "the biggest publishing turkey of all time".

Every single copy of David Blunkett's diaries *The Years of Boredom* has now been destroyed, it was later claimed.

But there are fears that even more books could still flood in from abroad when they are returned by disappointed book dealers.

● *For a full version of this story, visit www.blunkettbookdisaster.com*

● *Did you enjoy reading the above details of how to get a fuller version of the Blunkett story? Let us know at Eye Noticeboard www.getalife.com*

The England Cricket Team
An Apology

IN COMMON with other papers, we last month published an apology for previous allegations that the English cricket team was the greatest team on earth and was destined to retain the Ashes.

We would now like to apologise for our former apology, based, as it was, on the dismal performances of what we described as "England's sorry squad of losers".

We now recognise that, far from being the most disgraceful bunch of zeroes ever to leave our shores, England's cricketers are the finest sportsmen this country has ever produced.

Defeated Australian skipper Ricky "Punter" Ponting

We are sorry for any confusion these apologies may have caused and would like to apologise in advance for England's feeble performance in the forthcoming World Cup.

THE Sun

THE STORY YOU WON'T READ IN THE SUN

Anna Nicole Deng

THE SCHEMING temptress who stole her way into the heart of a foolish old man and stole all his money as well.

JOWELL NODS OFF

U.S. TAKEOVER ROCKS NEASDEN

by **E.I. Addio**, Our Man In The Sushi Bar With The Miso Soup And The Seaweed Sandwich

THE WORLD of soccer was rocked to its foundations when details of a projected US seven-figure takeover were revealed yesterday.

A shadowy business consortium headed by a group of Chicago businessmen is to buy the famous relegation-dogged North London club.

CAPO NEASDEN

Said a spokesman for the Capo Neasden consortium, "We have a lifelong love of your English sport of cricket and that is why we want to see Neasden in their rightful place as a leisure centre open seven days a week with free parking on Sundays."

Welcoming the takeover, ashen-faced club supremo Ron Knee, 59, said, "I have been to Chicago on several occasions to check out their credentials and these gentlemen were extremely generous.

"They showed me their plans, and the Squirrels fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) can rest assured that they have seen their last game of football."

OWN GOAL

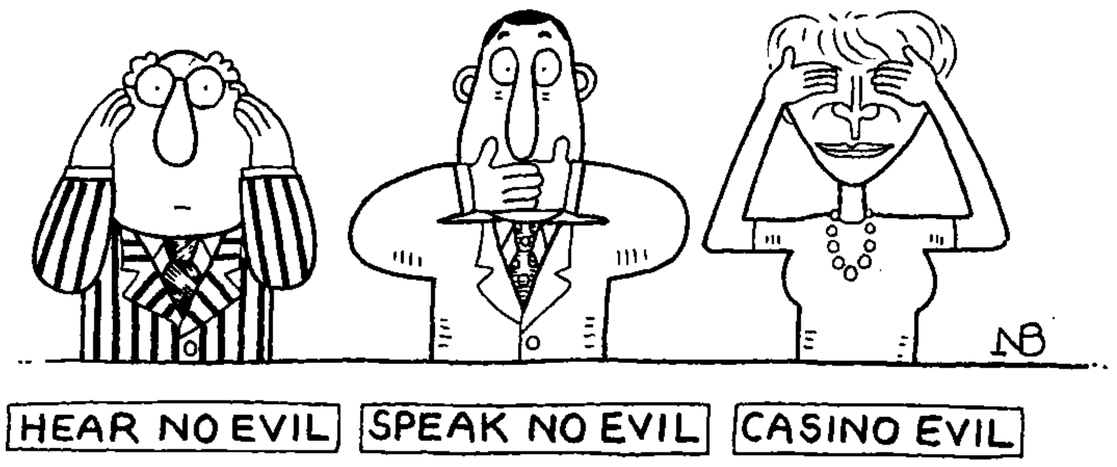
Knee later issued a clarification, denying any suggestion that the hallowed turf of Neasden Bridge would be buried beneath a massive leisure complex to rival Bluewater and nearby Brent Cross.

"Our new American owners fully respect our traditions," the tight-lipped mastermind said. "The only small change entails relocation of the matches. In future, the fans will have to visit the George V Memorial Park to see their heroes Wally Foot and Baldy Pevsner weaving their legendary magic on the cinders by the bandstand – provided the Council give them a permit."

Late Score

Anglo-Italian Trophy

Inter-Fascisti 0
Neasden Raccoons 0
(Match abandoned prior to kick-off)



STORM GROWS OVER BRITISH CASUALTY OF 'FRIENDLY FIRE'

by Our Defence Staff **Phil Coffin**

A HUGE international row erupted yesterday over a video shot during the Iraq war which shows how a disastrous blunder by two trigger-happy Americans led to the destruction of a British prime minister.

The two Americans, identified only as "President Dubya" and "Donny Rumsfeld", are heard ignoring warnings that their actions could result in the death of their British ally's career.

The fateful exchanges between the two gung-ho US servicemen were as follows:

Dubya: Let's shoot turkey, Rummy.

Rumsfeld: Way to go, Dubby! Eat lead, assholes! Shock 'n' awe!

Dubya: Ride 'em cowboy, yippee-yi-yay!

(Voice over intercom: "This is ground control to Major Dubya. Abort mission. Repeat – abort mission")

Dubya: No way, José. We have ass to kick.

(Voice over: "Target is member of coalition. He is friendly, repeat friendly")

Rumsfeld: The only good friend is a dead friend. Give it to him, George, with both barrels!

Dubya: It's high noon, towelheads!

(There is a sound of gunfire. Voice over intercom: "You have just

destroyed your friend Tony Blair")

Dubya: Shit, dude!

Rumsfeld: Mission accomplished!

Said one military expert last night, "This video makes it sadly clear that Dubya and Donny had no idea where they were or what they were doing. It has even been suggested that they might have been acting under strong stimulants when they launched their ill-fated attack on Iraq.

"However, it is already clear," he continued, "that neither of these men will face charges. They won't even have to explain their actions to the British public – so much for the special relationship."

Last night Mr Blair issued a statement saying, "I am not dead. I have nothing but praise for the actions of my American friends, and for the courage of Dubya in particular in killing me off."

HOW JOB HAS AGED BLAIR

1997

2007

Reid Pledges Crackdown On 'Chinese Immigrant Army'

by Our Political Staff **Terry Cotter**

THE Home Secretary, Dr John Reid, today promised to halt the threatened "invasion of Britain" by thousands of terracotta Chinese warriors.

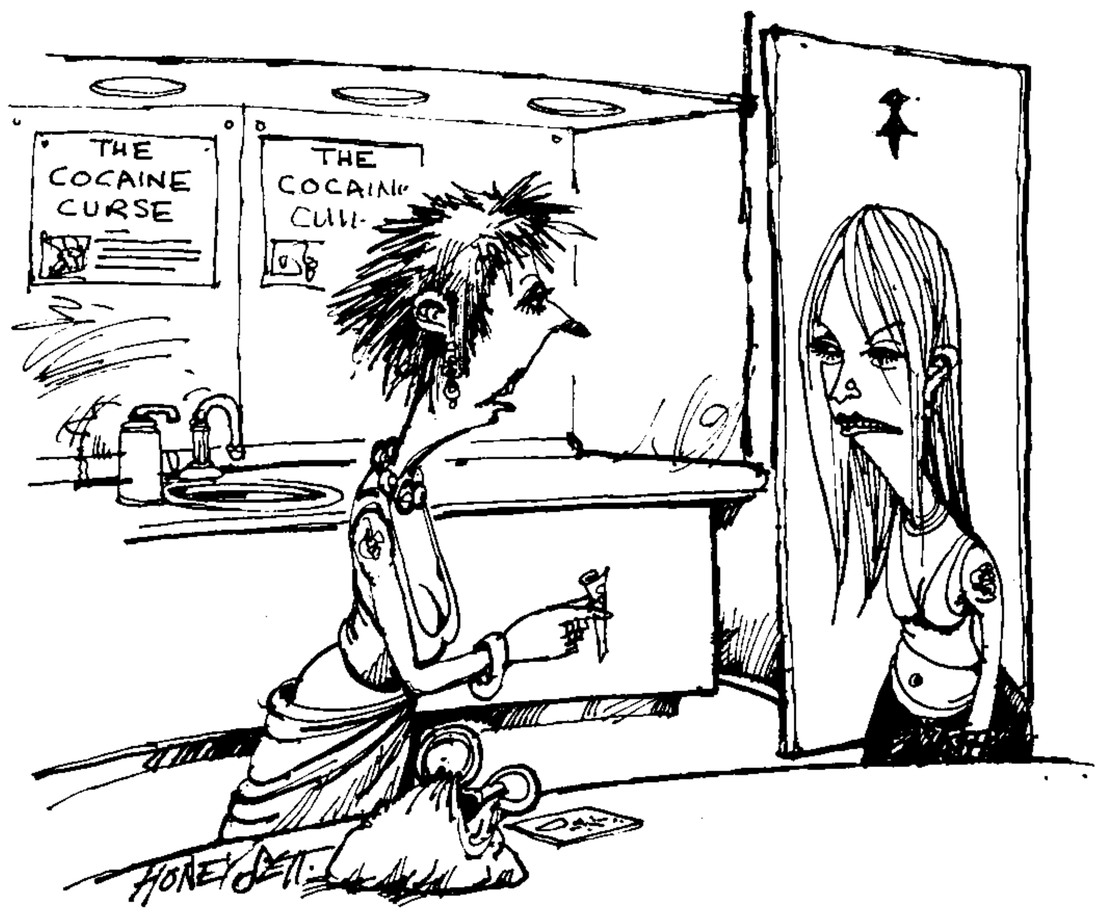
Said Dr Reid, "Obviously we are concerned about this number of immigrant statues swamping the entire country, placing an intolerable burden on our already overstretched infrastructure, and that is why I have to take firm action."

The Home Office has laid down that the number of ethnic Chinese warriors of terracotta extraction permitted to enter Britain will not exceed 12.

Last night, however, critics were quick to point out that, since Britain no longer operates any border controls, there is nothing to stop millions of the gallant oriental warriors from entering the country by train, aircraft, boat or even from being smuggled on the back of lorries on Eurostar, all demanding to be housed in the British Museum.

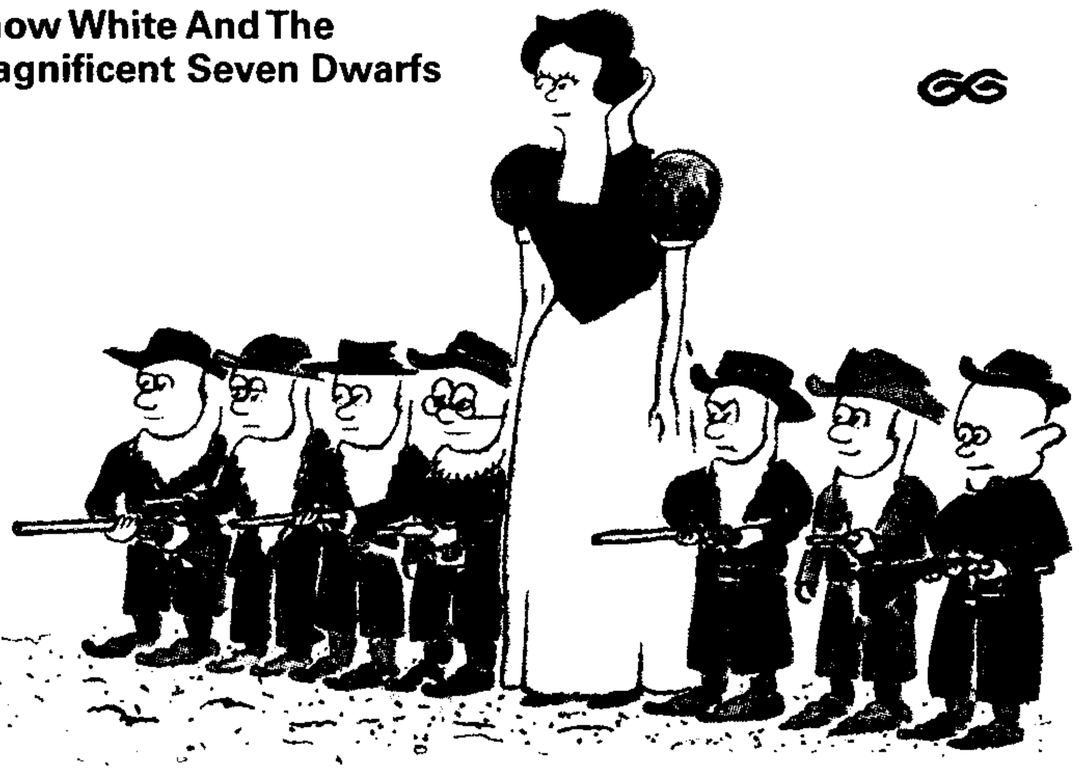
▶ **Fact:** The terracotta army, consisting of 2 million identical life-size figurines, was commissioned by the legendary Emperor Lib Dem Ming during the 3rd Century BC. When the aged Lib Dem saw the warriors, he decided that they were so boring that they should be buried in a huge hole in the ground. This was rediscovered in 1974 when a peasant was attempting to dig his way to Britain where his cousin had recently opened Glasgow's first Chinese takeaway. The Emperor Ming believed he was immortal and would one day rule the world with his army of Lib Dem councillors *(Surely "terracotta bores"?)*, aided by his trusted henchman Lem Sip Opek.

Private Eye is offering readers the chance to win 2,000 free tickets to see the new exhibition. All you have to do is name three of the Lib Dem party's front bench spokesmen (not including The Cheeky Girls)



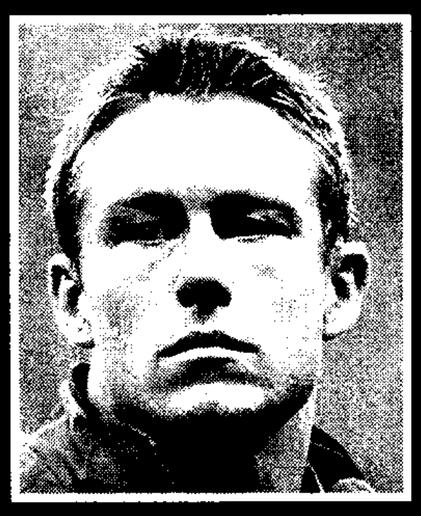
"Look, I know my habit causes problems in Colombia, but you try finding a Fair Trade drug dealer"

Snow White And The Magnificent Seven Dwarfs



EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

THAT ALL-PURPOSE JONNY WILKINSON PIECE IN FULL



THREE CHEERS/yawns for Jonny Wilkinson, England's rugby superhero/superbore. Yes, he's the dishy/dull beefcake who makes the nation's women swoon/snooze. Can anyone think of anything more exciting/tedious than watching England's dreamboat/automoton kicking England to glory/killing the game off.

With his rippling/over-developed torso and his thunderous/freakish thighs, Wilko is the stuff of every girl's dreams/nightmares.

Good At Kicking/ Needs A Good Kicking

Welcome back/clear off, Jonny. It's great to have you back, so that we can have something to be proud of/start attacking you again.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Frankie Laine, popular singer

So. Farewell
Then Frankie
Laine.

Famous for many
Hits, including
I Believe, *High Noon*, *Rawhide* and *Champion The Wonder Horse*.

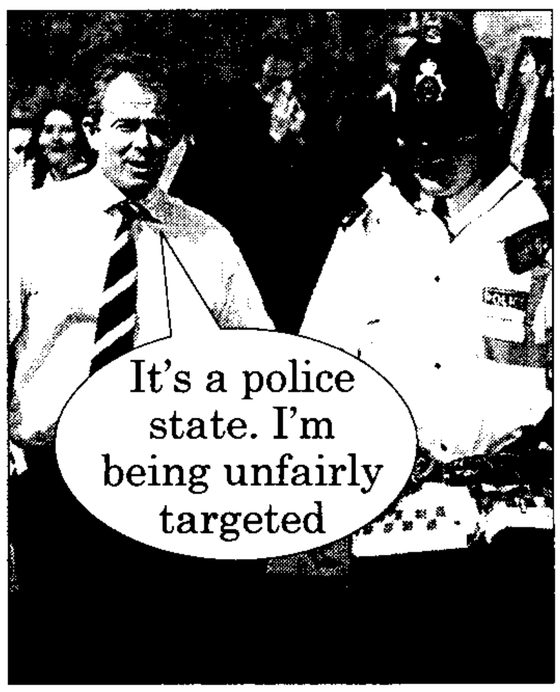
But Keith's
Mum says that
Her favourite
Was *Ghost Riders In The Sky*.

And now
You've become
One of them.

All together now –
Yippee-yi-o
Yippie-yi-ay...

E.J. Thribb (78 rpm)

NON-MUSLIM SPEAKS OUT



COURT CIRCULAR

Yesterday

His Royal Highness the Prince Harry attended the official opening of a bottle of vodka at 'Slappers Niteclub' in Kensington. His Royal Highness was accompanied by Lt. 'Pongo' Ricketson-Smythe (3rd King's Own Chunderers), Lt. Charlie 'Snorter' Snortington (17/21st Royal Green Wellingtons), Miss Chelsea Tractor, Miss Fruitella Fruitington, a bloke they had met in the pub earlier who seemed like a good laugh, and some other people who he can't remember now.

The Prince was introduced to a number of cocktails including 'The Shit Face' (8 parts rum, three parts brandy, 2 parts anti-freeze), the 'Hogwhimperer' (absinthe, curacao, Windolene) and the 'Va-va-vom' (a yard of gin with a bucket of Baileys chaser).

The Prince and his party proceeded to the floor before being accompanied out of the club by Mr Dean Meathead (Fellow of the Royal Institute of Bouncers). He then attended an informal photocall in the gutter with Mr Len Scap, Mr Sid Snaps, Signor Sleazi Papparazzi, Monsieur Phil Espace and various other representatives of the international press.

Today

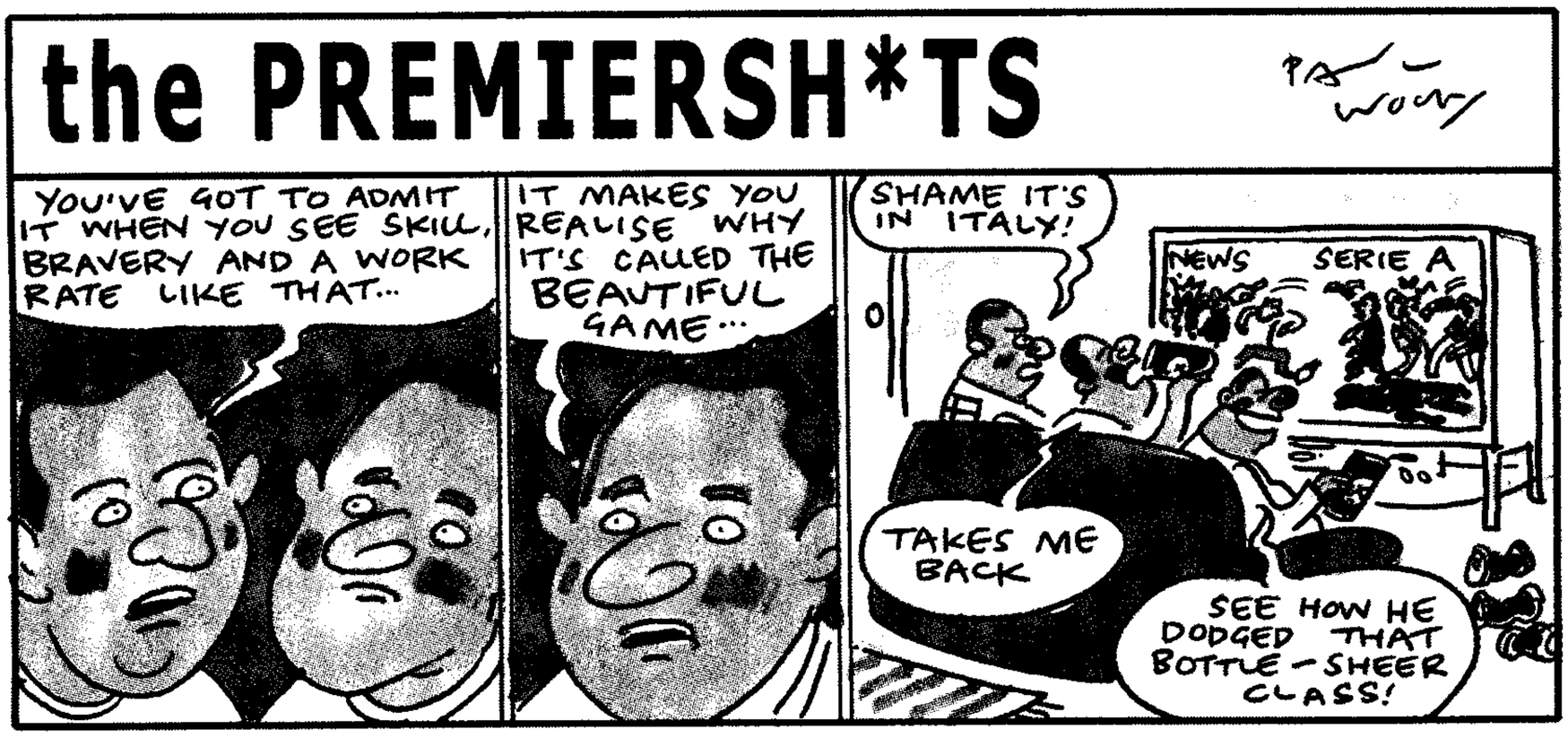
The Duchess Fergiana will attend the opening of a cheque book held by American Society magazine, Bizarre Harpies. She will proceed to be rude about the Royal Family and then complain that they never invite her round any more.

She will then sit for an official portrait by top American society photographer, Adobe Photoshop, accompanied by his assistant, Plenty O'Airbrush.

Tomorrow

Her Majesty the Queen Helen Mirren will receive many hundreds of awards from her loyal subjects.

the PREMIERSH*TS


YOU'VE GOT TO ADMIT IT WHEN YOU SEE SKILL, BRAVERY AND A WORK RATE LIKE THAT...
IT MAKES YOU REALISE WHY IT'S CALLED THE BEAUTIFUL GAME...
SHAME IT'S IN ITALY!
NEWS
SERIE A
TAKES ME BACK
SEE HOW HE DODGED THAT BOTTLE-SHEER CLASS!

The Cliff Hotel welcomes you to
CHER TRIBUTE NIGHT
FEATURING STEVE SINCLAIR FROM "STARS IN YOUR EYES" PERFORMING ALL YOUR FAVOURITE SONGS FROM THE GREAT MAN
Advertisement, Tivy-Side

'TERROR WEATHER' STRIKES

by Our Snow Affairs Correspondent **Nicholas Blezzard**

THE Home Secretary John Reid has warned the public to be vigilant after an unprecedented wave of terror weather swept across Britain.

"We are advising the public to be vigilant and not to touch the suspicious white powdery substance which has been deposited, seemingly at random, across Britain," a clearly worried Home Secretary told reporters.

"We do not, at this stage, know whether it is a sole individual with a grudge against streets or a Muslim terror organisation so we are going to blame all of them in an attempt to whip up as much hysterical press coverage as possible ."

Police say they urgently want to speak to a Mr Juaq F'rost in regards to the campaign of terror weather, which has left a number of people quite chilly.

The Snowman (2007)

"All flights are cancelled due to bad weather"

CLIMATE CHANGE: BRITAIN UNDER THREAT, BBC1, 8pm
★★★★ *(Not in Scotland)*

Daily Express

THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA
MONDAY 19TH FEBRUARY 2007
12A, Documentary on Al Gore's campaign on global warming.

Cinema ad, Aldershot

News in Brief

7 INCHES OF HEADLINES TO PARALYSE BRITAIN

BRITAIN was put on full alert yesterday for newspapers to dump up to seven inches of hysterical headlines and plunge much of the country into chaos *(cont. p. 94)*

CAMERON BATHTIME SHOCK

TORY leader David Cameron has insisted that, despite his packed daily timetable filled with photo opportunities and appearances on daytime ITV chat shows, he will still have time as the Conservative leader for 'an early bath'.

"You only have to look at the Conservatives' slump in the polls to realise that I'll soon be following in the footsteps of my predecessors by taking an early bath," said David *(cont. p. 95)*

"Come on, it's really important to warm down"

THE TIMES Friday February 16 2007

How many Times a week?

The biggest-ever report on our secret habits

AN extraordinary new survey reveals that the average couple is having the Times newspaper only once or twice a week. Some are having it less than once a month and 69% of the population never have the Times at all.

Other disturbing results show that men in their fifties are more likely to be unfaithful to the Times and start reading the Daily Telegraph. However, women in their thirties are most prone to fantasise about buying the Daily Mail.

Said leading sexologist Sir William Rees-Snogg, "It's clear that people's habits have changed. Many adults are just too tired to have the Times and would rather have sex than read another boring survey in the Times."

Full results, charts, suggestive pix p. 94

Mary Ann Bighead

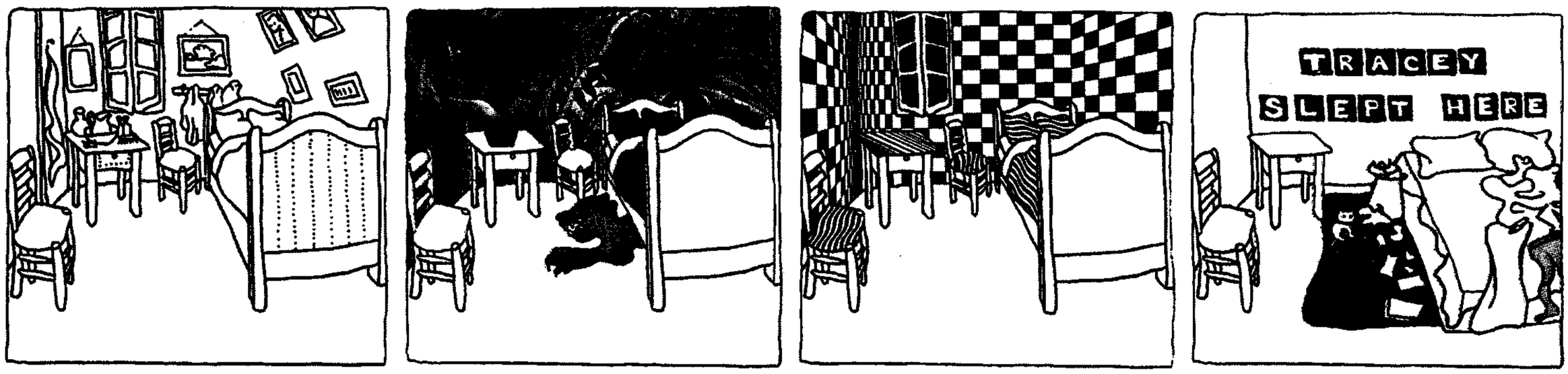
STandards of grammar today really are appalling – and I'm constantly amazed at how much less clever people are than me. Take, for example, the use of the word "less" when the correct term is "fewer" – and you can see this elementary mistake, as in "6 items or less", in supermarkets up and down the country (presumably run by people who aren't clever enough to write for the *Times*!).

But I was surprised to find exactly the same mistake in hundreds of letters sent to the editor of this newspaper demanding that he print "less" articles by Mary Ann Bighead. I told the editor that the word they should have used was of course "fewer". He disagreed, and said the correct word was "none". Which just goes to show that men aren't as clever as women, and women aren't as clever as me!

© *Mary Ann Bighead*

Artists in Residence

Sioux Bradshaw



Vincent van Gogh | Henri Rousseau | Bridget Riley | Tracey Emin

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S DAILY FEMAIL!!

■ **KYLIE MINOGUE!!?! What a star!!?! No wonder they want her undies in the V&A (that's the Victoria & Albert Museum, stoopid, not some new version of M&S, geddit?!!?) Say what you like, this pint-sized princess of pop has won the hearts of the whole world with her brave battle against the Big C (that's cancer, stoopid, not a new *branch* of C&A!?!) From the tomboy in *Neighbours* to the superstar of the silver screen, this Diva from Down Under has sprinkled her own special brand of stardust over all our lives!?! Glenda's message is simple – Karry on Kylie for ever!!?! We love you!!?!**

■ KYLIE MINOGUE!?!! Arent'cha sick of her!?!! Open a paper and what do you see? Two and a half inches of nothing, a-prancin' and a-dancin' in her undies!?! And, can you believe it, they've even put them in a glass case in a museum!!?! Gawd 'elp us!?! OK, so she's had cancer. Who hasn't?!? Millions of women suffer worse than Kylie – but don't have their knickers in a museum!!?! You can't dance, you can't sing – and your knickers are nothing to write home about either!?! Glenda's message is simple – Klear off Kylie, for ever!?! We love you!!?!

■ *KYLIE MINOGUE!?! What a girl!!?! Aren'tcha sick of her??!?*

■ HERE THEY are – Glenda's Valentine's Day 'Valentinos'!?!!

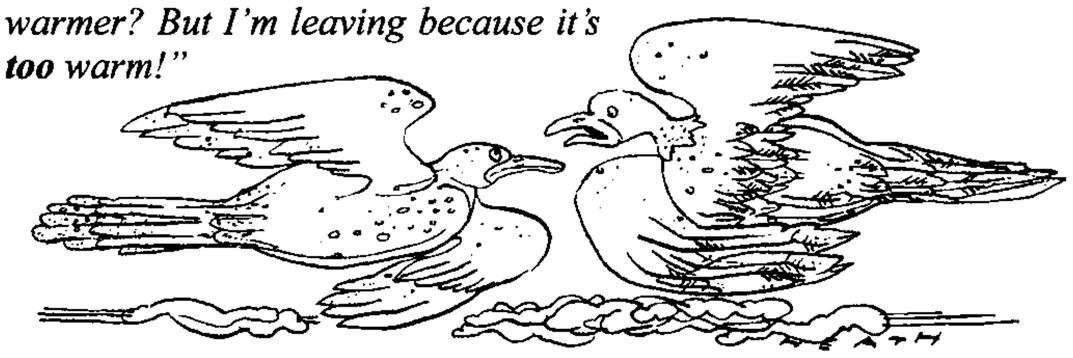
● **Stephen Glover,** the *Daily Mail*'s Mister Gloom!?! Don'tcha just "glove" him??!?

● **Matt D'Ancona,** the *Spectator*'s Mister Dull?!?? You can be a "spectator" in my bedroom any time!!?! Geddit!?!!

● **Anatole Kaletsky!?!** Crazy name, crazy guy!?!!

Byeeee!!!

*"You mean you're coming back to get warmer? But I'm leaving because it's **too** warm!"*



My eBay

russell-of-silk (1890)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-4 of 4 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **"My First Thesaurus" – make language fun! Pocket-size ppbk**	£4.99	£1.50	1
☐ **Hairspray, max hold, 1 gross cans**	£59.99	£25.00	1
☐ **"How To Date Women" CD hypnosis course – unbelievable results!**	£10.00	£3.50	1
☐ **Home-Brew Kit – Absinthe**	£15.00	£4.50	1

Items I'm Selling (1 of 1 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **"The Dandy" annual (bought in error)**	£1.99	£2.00	0

ISLAMIST LOGIC

Part 94

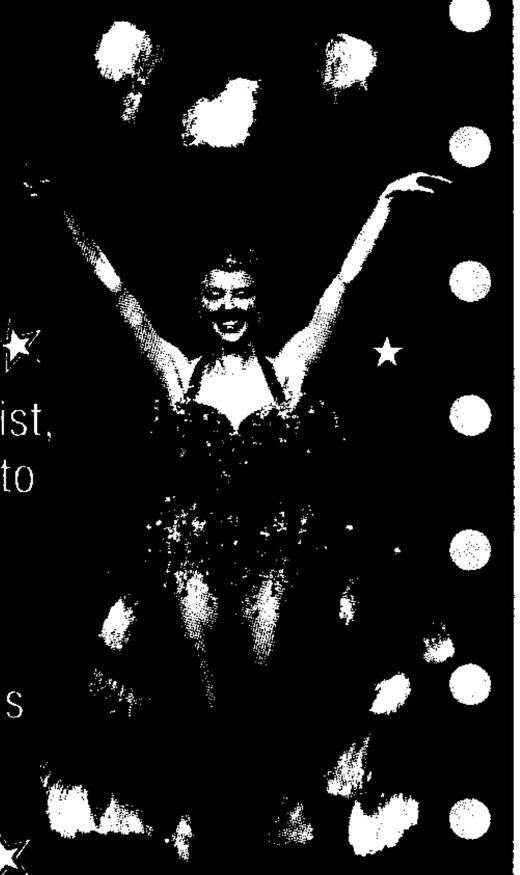
"Britain is a police state for Moslems with a judiciary and police force enforcing heavy-handed, bigoted laws..."

"... which is why we need to introduce Sharia Law as soon as possible"

The Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum are proud to present an exhibition of the work of the 21st Century's foremost bottom, Miss Kylie Minogue.

KYLIE

THE EXHIBITION



Miss Minogue is an internationally-renowned artist, and this unique opportunity to view her collection of flimsy hotpants and other assorted "skimpiana" is in no way an indication that the Museum is "bumming down" (*Surely "dumbing"? Ed.*).

This definitive, ground-breaking and highly-lucrative multimedia exhibition will also include the world premiere of the remix of Kylie's greatest work, "Can't Get You Into A Museum (*Except Like This*)".

V&A

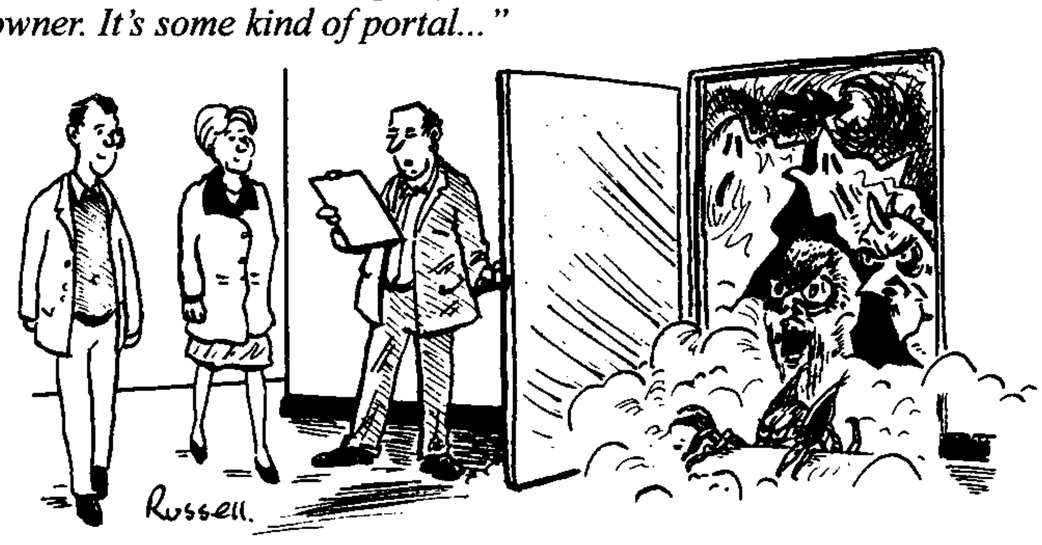
"We don't know much about arse, but we know what we like!"

It's all on display at

T&A

(Surely "V&A"? Ed.)

"And this was knocked through by the last owner. It's some kind of portal..."



Nursery Times

Friday, February 16, 2007

WHY WON'T GRUNT MARRY HIS PUDDLEDUCK? asks Beatrix Lee-Potter

FASHIONABLE pig-about-town Hugh Grunt is raising eyebrows around the farmyard, as the weeks go by and he fails to pop the question to his longtime avian squeeze Jemima Puddleduck, heiress daughter to the late Sir Jeremy Fishpaste, the well-known frog and keen amateur angler.

Will he or won't he? Hugh knows

Grunt's fear of commitment, say friends, has already cost him the chance to settle down with 'bunny girl' Liz Flopsy, who is now walking out with a fabulously wealthy Indian elephant, Mr Ali Barbar.

Jemima Puddleduck, who was previously married to the notorious Imran Fox, is said to be getting impatient, as the debonair romantic Grunt dithers about their future together, and refuses to set up a stye together.

Mr Fox was unavailable for comment last night. A spokesman said that he was out 'hunting for chicks'.

Beano Boris on the implications of the recent outbreak of Avian Flu

"I've always liked stuffing the odd bird"

Blimey! Johnny Foreigner has got the nerve to give the old thumbs down to honest British turkey – just because it's got some killer disease! Cripes and double cripes! Isn't that just typical of our cowardy custard cousins from abroad! Well, never fear, yours truly is going to start gobbling turkey as if there was no tomorrow! Which there will be, by the way, whatever the scaredy-cat boffins try and tell you! Mmmm... Turkey Twizzlers, Turkey Nuggets, Turkey-flavoured Turkeys with Turkey Sauce. That's what's on the Beano Family Menu from now on. And jolly yummy tuck it is too! Anyway, I've been scoffing brother turkey for my whole life and it hasn't done me any harm! What? Atishoo! Atishoo! Yikes! Crikey! Oooo-er! Anyone know any doctor chappies?

On other pages ● Is it safe to read Boris's column? A doctor writes

Abu Izzadeen chooses a shampoo

What You Missed

The Today Programme

6.42 a.m.

Woman with posh voice *(Sarah Montague, for it is she)*: ... as the great bird flu pandemic reaches crisis proportions, we go over to the government's chief veterinary scientist on the spot in Suffolk.

Good morning, Mr Clipboard, you are the government's chief veterinary scientist on the spot in Suffolk.

Clipboard: Good morning.

Montague: And I think the question everyone is asking this morning is just how likely is it that this deadly strain of HN51 avian flu swill spread to the human population?

Clipboard: That is extremely unlikely.

Montague: So what you're saying is that it's now only a matter of time before this killer virus claims its first tragic human victims out here in Suffolk?

Clipboard: No, what I was saying is that such a scenario is highly unlikely.

Montague: So you agree with me that it won't be long before millions of men, women and helpless toddlers are dying a slow and painful death?

Clipboard: I think the chances of anything like that happening are so low as to be negligible.

Montague: A frightening prospect indeed! And still on the bird flu story – we're just getting some breaking news that apparently one of the poultry workers has got a nasty cough, which confirms everything that the ministry vet, Mr Clipboard, was telling us this morning.

And we're going over live now to our reporter Phil Airtime, who is standing outside the home of Dave Henpusher, the poultry worker who is almost certainly the first of millions of people in this country who are doomed to die of this terrifying plague.

Phil, what are you hearing out there on the spot in Suffolk?

Airtime: Well, Sarah, I'm standing here outside the home of Mr Henpusher, who works at the poultry plant which is at the centre of the crisis. Information is a bit sketchy at the moment, but what we do know is that Mr Henpusher didn't go to work this morning because he was suffering from a very severe cough.

I'm now looking at his bedroom window across the street, and I can tell you that the curtains are still completely drawn and that there is no sign of life.

Montague: So the chances are that he's dead? Is that the feeling where you are, Phil?

Airtime: Absolutely, Sarah. It's obviously too early to speculate, but what we are hearing is that there is every indication that the long-feared killer flu epidemic has now claimed its first British victim.

Montague: Well, we'll have to leave it there, Phil, but thank you for confirming that bird flu has claimed its first British victim. And now it's time for the latest headlines from Jim.

Jim Naughtie *(for it is he)*: And here are today's headlines. A Government scientist has dismissed fears that the Suffolk bird flu outbreak will spread to humans. And Suffolk poultry farm worker Dave Henpusher has tested negative for any sign of the virus. He has gone to the chemist to buy some cough sweets and hopes to be back at work later this morning.

And now – Thought For The Day, from our old friend, Rabbi Lionel Blue.

Rabbi Blue: Hullo Brian. Hullo Sailor. You know, we've heard a lot about global warming, but as my old granny used to say

(cont. 94kHz)

DIARY

SHILPA SHETTY'S BRITAIN

I feel very humble. It indeed affords one a most happy feeling to take the opportunity for relaxation in Great Britain – particularly after the somewhat claustrophobic circumstances within which I previously discovered myself!

Yours is a wonderful country full of delightful Britons, young and old. My recent enjoyments have included meeting Mr Max Clifford, who has most generously agreed to look after my publicity demands. Mr Clifford is very much a gentleman of the old school – very 'posh' and well-spoken, with perfect manners and gracious dignity. As we say back in India, he is as honest as the day is long.

I trust I am breaking no confidences when I say that he fully deserves the knighthood he tells me Her Majesty the Queen promised him the last time she took him out for a five-star meal with brandy at one of London's historic restaurants. "I would have taken care of that bill, Shilpa," he told me. "But the Queen grabbed it from the waiter like nobody's business and before I know where I am she's paid it with her VIP Platinum Card, saying, 'Max – you're worth it.' Magic moment, Shilpa. Lovely lady, great brand."

Mr Clifford is proud to handle only the most prestigious clients, who bring honour to their country and are admired both by those at home and those abroad. Her Majesty the Queen is obviously one of the most illustrious, and Mr Clifford continues to dedicate his efforts to assure her of a high profile worldwide, but there are many others no less dignified than that gracious sovereign. Mr Simon Cowell, Miss Mandy Allwood, Mr O.J. Simpson, Faria Alam, Mr Tony Martin, Miss Rebecca Loos: to be perfectly honest, these are not names vastly well-known to those of us from India, but Mr Clifford assures me they are all highly respected and talented individuals, and that each of them, in his or her own way, is determined, with his assistance, to make this world a better place.

This week, Mr Clifford took me on a thoroughly whirlwind tour of the British Isles, so I was able to discover for myself what a civilised country you have, jam-filled with noble traditions, stretching back over many many centuries.

May I take one example? In Bombay, we have not as yet been initiated into your wonderfully rich British tradition of vomiting outside public houses on the stroke of midnight. Believe me, I have no wish to criticise this tradition of, as it were, clearing one's throat, in fact, I feel sure it is most upstanding, and you should feel rightly proud of it, but in India our customs are a little different, that is all. It is, you might say, something we have yet to learn. One thing is for sure though – I will certainly be taking your enchanting "V-Sign" gesture of greeting back to Bombay: it is so very charming, so understated, so British.

British food, too, is every bit an adventure! As you must surely know already, Mr Clifford is a highly-regarded Ambassador for the British Way of Life. He assures me that Mr Kofi Annan is a very dear friend, and apparently Mr Nelson Mandela warmly welcomed his advice on turning around public perception while he was in prison, with the result that when he came out, he was made President! In the hands of Mr Clifford, it is to be hoped that wars will soon come to an end, as people discover the virtue of peaceful negotiation. We are all people, after all. So imagine my delight when he expressed such great enthusiasm for me to introduce Britain's national dish to a wider international market!

I would beg you to forgive my ignorance, but I have in the past been woefully unaware that Sir Bernard Matthews' Turkey Twizzlers is recognised by one and all as your national dish.

Mr Clifford tells me that Sir Bernard Matthews' Turkey Twizzlers are invariably served at the finest state banquets at which your beloved Royal Family and your leading statesmen entertain foreign Very Important Personages. In fact, Mr Clifford tells me that Sir Bernard's plump turkeys are literally never out of the news!

This project is really most exciting. Mr Clifford is convinced that, if it is acceptable to the noble Sir Bernard for me to offer the name of Shilpa Shetty to be attached to his excellent upmarket product, then, if all goes according to plan, The Shilpa Shetty Turkey Roast will soon be gracing the dining-tables of not only Her Majesty and His Royal Highness Prince Philip, but also of her devoted subjects. The honour is really most considerable.

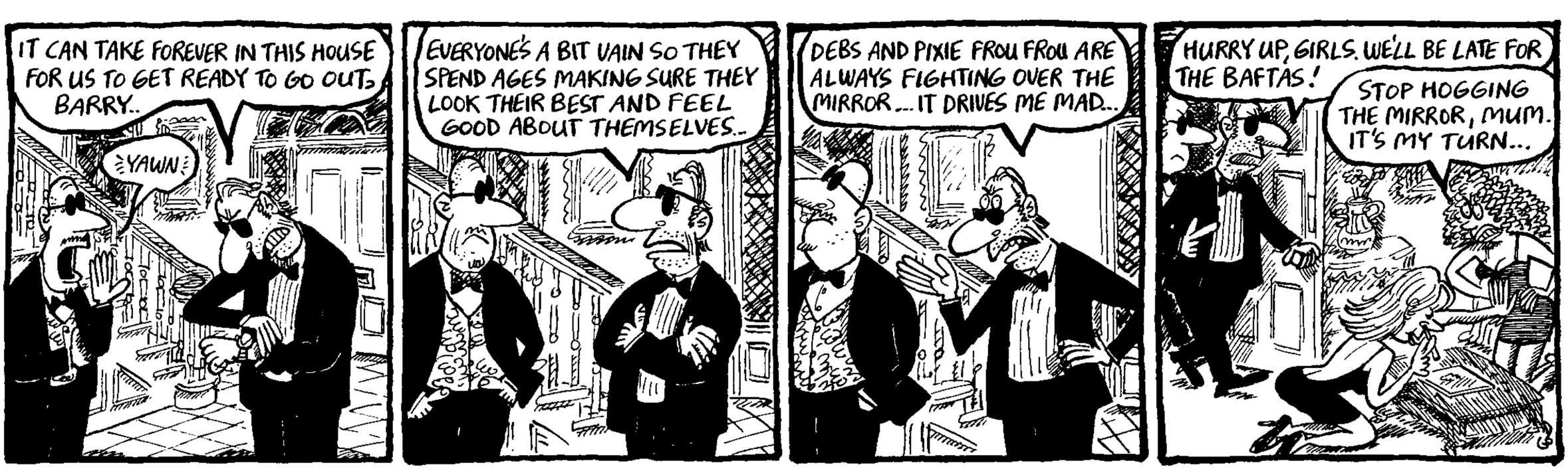
I also take it as a superlative honour that I have been permitted to ride as a passenger on your British railway system. It is something most people can only dream about. Compared to our Indian railways, the trains are perhaps a little overcrowded, but, no matter, it is always a tremendous privilege to stand side-by-side so many different sorts of people in conditions of such close-knit intimacy and friendship. On the train, a young gentleman perhaps misunderstood something I had said – alas, my English is far from perfect, for which many apologies! It so happened he called me something impolite, which I know he would not wish me to repeat here. But the gentleman meant nothing by it, so I was happy to forgive him. Later, I noticed out of the corner of my eye Mr Clifford offering him a business card, to help him make some pocket-money by offering Britain's leading Sunday newspaper the story of our encounter. "20 per cent to me, the rest's all yours, son," I heard Mr Clifford say. How magnanimous a gentleman he truly is!

Life away from the Big Brother house has been something of a "hurly-burly". Many of your most highly-regarded politicians and thinkers have been kind enough to offer to have their photograph taken with me. They include the leading Liberal world statesman Mr Lembit Opik, the wealthy philanthropist and aristocrat Lord Archer and the renowned philosopher Mr Andrew Neil. A few days ago, I was even presented to your esteemed Deputy Prime Minister, Mr John Prescott. He was so very civilised, going out of his way to teach me one of the time-honoured old English customs associated with his ancient post. The things one learns! I really can't wait to get home to tell my family how the Deputy Prime Minister must greet every visitor by releasing his Belt-of-Office and dropping his ancient trousers whilst simultaneously winking with one eye!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


IT CAN TAKE FOREVER IN THIS HOUSE FOR US TO GET READY TO GO OUT, BARRY..
YAWN
EVERYONE'S A BIT VAIN SO THEY SPEND AGES MAKING SURE THEY LOOK THEIR BEST AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES..
DEBS AND PIXIE FROU FROU ARE ALWAYS FIGHTING OVER THE MIRROR... IT DRIVES ME MAD...
HURRY UP, GIRLS. WE'LL BE LATE FOR THE BAFTAS!
STOP HOGGING THE MIRROR, MUM. IT'S MY TURN...

Literary Review

Junk Mailer

The Castle in the Forest
Norman Mailer
(LittleBrown £16-99)

ALTHOUGH Norman Mailer's 35 books in his 60-year writing career have covered most forms – novel, biography, memoir, reportage, drama – he has never written a kids' story and, at 84, is perhaps unlikely to now. So, wanting to dedicate a publication to his ten grandchildren, one grand-niece and four god-children, he has given them this one.

Regular Mailer readers may be alarmed by this unexpected flash of sentimentality from an author noted for machismo, provocation, obscenity prosecutions and several arrests, including one for stabbing the second of his six wives. But they need not have worried. Stormin' Norman hasn't settled for being a grandpa yet. Written with a characteristic savagery and strangeness that sometimes seem to border on madness, this is a book which none of the young dedicatees should be permitted to read much before the age of 25.

It is, in fact, a sort of kids' book, but the kid is Adolph Hitler, whose childhood is the story Mailer tells. Norm has described the making of a monster before, in his best book, *The Executioner's Song*, a mammoth documentary reconstruction of the life of the executed killer Gary Gilmore. In that case, though, he was hampered by being restricted to the facts about Gilmore's childhood. Writing about little "Adi", he can let his imagination go.

Where it goes is sex and shit. Beginning with "apocalyptic intercourse in barn straw", the novel imagines the incestuous couplings of Adi's grandparents, and lashings of anal penetration as a 19th century German form of contraception ("she had kept the formal entrance to her chastity intact, but the same could not be said of its neighbour") until we get to the night when ma and pa Hitler made Adi. There's a pause because Pa's penis, which he likes to call "The Hound" is "soft as a coil of excrement" (interesting metaphor, Herr Freud!), but, eventually, after a bit of 69 foreplay, the Hound spurts out his half of Adolph Hitler.

Adi, early on, catches his father giving cunnilingus to his mother, and, making the book a double homage to Freud, becomes obsessed with "caca". During one excretory interlude, the narrator declares: "On caca, is marriage based."

Ah, the narrator. The sex and shit are joined, in Mailer's unholy trinity of preoccupations in this novel, by another s-word: Satan. The person telling the story, who presents himself as an "Intelligence Officer", turns out to be junior employee of the devil. The author's conceit is that, just as the Angel Gabriel in Christian teaching engineered the conception of Jesus, so Satan planted the seed of Hitler. And be aware that this is no fancy literary conceit. Norm told Radio 4 that this is his personal theology.

These crackpot beliefs give the book a certain wild grandeur but, as a novel, it's too sloppy, including a lengthy interlude in Tsarist Russia which even Norm realises is so boring that he tells readers that they can skip it if they want and pick up with Hitler again on page 261.

As is often the case with this American giant, only Mailer could have written this book. But, as is almost equally often the case, he possibly shouldn't have. Always obsessed with size, literary and otherwise, Mailer was clearly desperate to get another big one out before he dies, but this isn't it.

It's a useful rule of psychology that a person's enemies often represent the person they dread becoming or fear that they secretly are. Mailer has had a long rivalry with Gore Vidal. While the stand-off holds elements of sexual tension – Mailer has never seemed at ease with homosexuality, Truman Capote being his punch-bag before Vidal – the mutual hostility most rests on the fact that both men are politically interested to an unusual degree and have alternated between novels and essays, and so are fighting for the same belt in American letters.

Norm frequently declares that Gore is a "good essayist but a bad novelist". Deep in his heart, though, he's trying to palm off his own most feared epitaph on to someone else. Probably the greatest reporter-essayist America has ever had, Mailer really wants to be remembered for his novels.

The Castle in the Forest, though, makes you wish that he'd written a non-fiction book about Hitler.

Jam yesterday

Clinton Heylin
Babylon's Burning: From Punk to Grunge
(Viking Penguin, £20)

MY DEAR, the *size* of these books on the highly obscure and long moribund phenomenon known as punk rock! Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming*, which more or less founded the genre back in 1991, had the dimensions of a stout firebrick. John Robb's *Punk: An Oral History* and Simon Reynolds' *Rip It Up And Start Again*, last year's additions to an already groaning shelf, were practically Tolstoyan in their scope. And now, cantering clamorously in their wake, comes Mr Clinton Heylin with no fewer than 693 closely printed pages on a subject so marginal that a tenth this number might be thought excessive.

Do I exaggerate? The history of British pop, or rather the tiny part of it in which Mr H and his chums take an interest, can be briefly summarised. By around 1975 hip young pop people had grown sadly disillusioned with the bombastic "progressive" noise offered by such long-haired ensembles as Genesis, Yes and ELP. Abetted by the return to roots then animating the London pub circuit, a devious pop Svengali named Malcolm McLaren contrived to foment a "movement", based on the gang of lairy hoodlums known as the Sex Pistols, whose dress styles and minimalist musical stylings swiftly caught on in provincial cities.

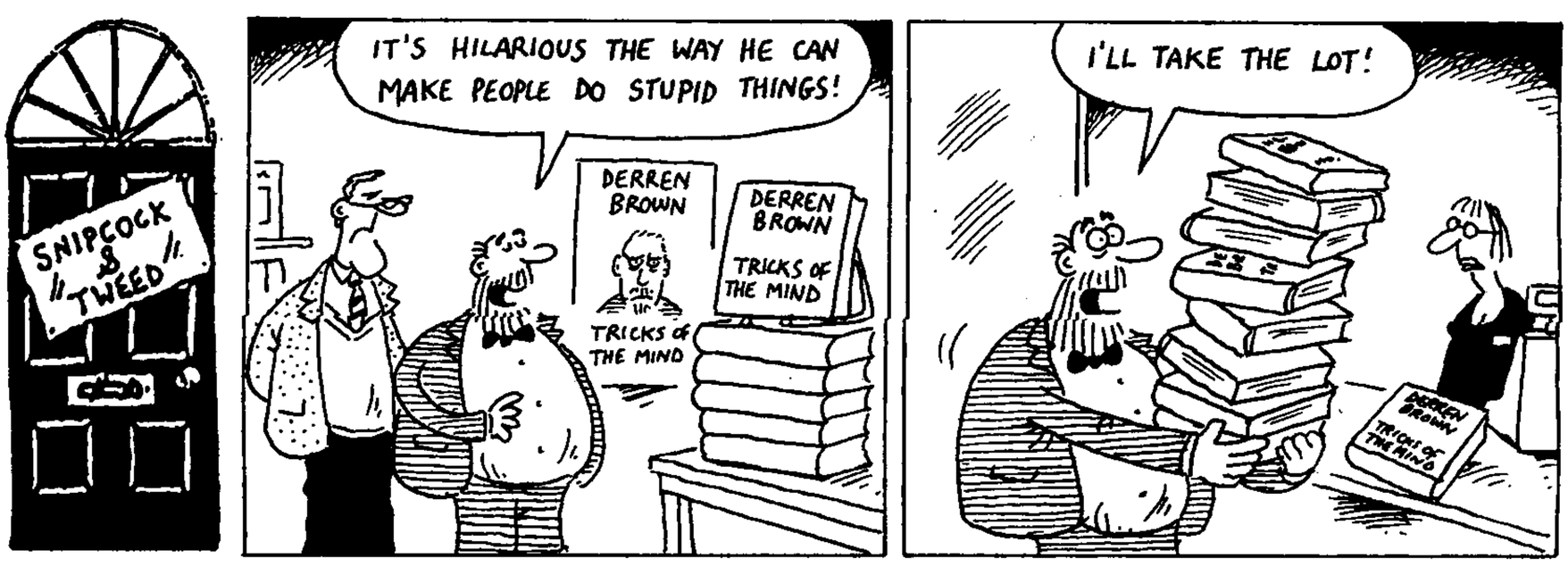
The whole thing lasted less than a year and was swiftly gobbled up and anesthetised by the record business. As ever with a successful youth cult, the real fortunes and reputations were made by people only marginally connected to it who were now offered a sympathetic environment in which to operate. Commercially, with one or two flagrant exceptions, it was irretrievably small scale. In music mythology, 1977 is the year of the Pistols, The Clash and The Jam, but it was the Bee Gees and the Eagles who shifted records.

Now, how do we get 700 pages out of this? Well, one way is to follow the story on and sketch in the long laps of baton-passing that connect Johnny Rotten to Yankee extremists such as Kurt Cobain. Another is to dwell lavishly on obscurities from the vault. Subway Sect anyone? The Prefects? The Killjoys? A third is to wear your taste for the terminally abstruse like a pair of bondage strides. This is the kind of excursus in which sentences routinely begin "When Television and Rocket from the Tomb shared their 25 June 1975 bill at the Piccadilly Penthouse in Cleveland, both bands were on the verge of meltdown..." The precise lineage of The Clash's drum-stool? The exact sequence of events at the legendary Sex Pistols gig at Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall? The itinerary of the celebrated – well, to the few hundred people who attended it – Anarchy Tour? They're all here, and the effect is like having dozens of copies of the *New Musical Express* from 1977 pass before your eyes in an endless loop.

To do Mr Heylin justice, he does have a couple of points in his favour. One is that he disdains the Jon Savage line of pop as socio-political construct in which musicians brilliantly embody the hiatus between Old Labourism and New Thatcherism in a post-modern industrial landscape and so forth. The other is that he immediately fingers The Clash as pin-head opportunists whose politics were as contrived as their paint-sprayed jackets (as Heylin shows, any genuine stirrings of political awareness shown by the Class of '76 could be summarised on the back of a small postcard). On the debit side, alas, is the hulking gap between our proud author and any semblance of a prose style.

In fact, *Babylon's Burning* is a kind of epic jamboree of mixed metaphors, verbal conceits narrowly stopped short on the right side of insanity and clanging alliteration. Post-punks Wire apparently "steeped themselves in strains of English quintessence". The Pistols, meanwhile, were "a combustible concoction just a hair trigger away from fission". Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill were recruited by the *New Musical Express* "to upset the applecart and make hay". Of the crowd who attended the Pistols gig in Manchester, "it was the hardy and the hip who turned up that night to the home of the Halle Orchestra..."

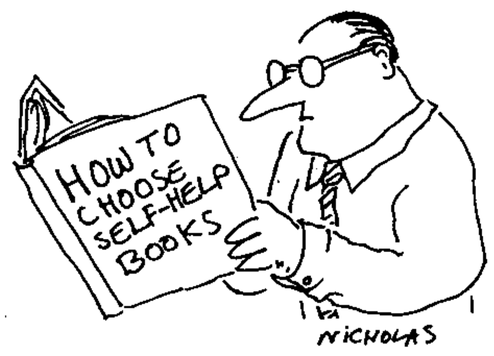
Oh, and if we're going for strict accuracy, I should say that in The Jam's "This Is The Modern World" Paul Weller doesn't sing "I don't give two shits about your review" but "I don't give two fucks", on the album version, or "I don't give a damn", on the bowdlerised single. These things *matter*. There was once a rock scribe who could write about this stuff with suitable seriousness, wit and awareness of the wider social surround - the late Ian Macdonald, author of *Revolution in the Head* and *The People's Music*. In his absence, bastard descendants gibber and fret.


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S HILARIOUS THE WAY HE CAN MAKE PEOPLE DO STUPID THINGS!
DERREN BROWN
TRICKS OF THE MIND
DERREN BROWN
TRICKS OF THE MIND
I'LL TAKE THE LOT!
DERREN BROWN
TRICKS OF THE MIND

Books & Bookmen

■ GLOATING galore from Anthony "ex-Fatty" Cheetham last week as the Costa book of the year award went to Stef Penney's *The Tenderness of Wolves*, one of the first novels issued by his new publishing firm, Quercus. As he gleefully pointed out, the book was rejected by many London publishers before being picked up by Quercus.

But who deserves the credit? Step forward Rosie de Courcy, one of Cheetham's ex-wives. She was an editor at Little Brown while *The Tenderness of Wolves* was doing the rounds, and after reading the typescript decided it was a winner. Little Brown did not agree so she urged Fatty to snap it up for his new imprint. Greater love hath no ex-wife than this...



■ QUERCUS's next big title, meanwhile, is *The Invincible Quest*, a new book written by none other than Conrad Black. It's said to be a "short book", but only by Black's epic standards of verbosity: a mere 800 pages, as against the 1,300 in his life of FD Roosevelt.

It will be published simultaneously in Britain and the US in May – two months after Black's trial starts. But Conrad himself wanted the American publisher, Public Affairs, to rush it out in March, so he could be seen striding into the Chicago courthouse holding a copy on his first day in the dock. Not only would this help publicise the book, he reasoned, it might even improve his chances of acquittal – on the grounds that the author of such a serious and weighty tome can't be a spiv.

This argument might be more persuasive had he chosen almost any other subject to write about. For the book's full title is *The Invincible Quest: The Life of Richard Milhous Nixon*.

■ WITH three months to go until the latest instalment of Naim Attallah's memoirs is published by Quartet (N. Attallah, prop.), he is already hyping it up. "It will be dynamite!" he told the *Evening Standard* last week.

One score to be settled in *Fulfilment and Betrayal: 1975-1995* is with Jennie Erdal, who worked as Attallah's ghost-writer for 15 years and then revealed all in her memoir *Ghosting*. According to Erdal's account, scarcely anything published under his name was actually written by him. In reply, Attallah points out that he has now produced three volumes of autobiography since Erdal's departure – which, clearly, must be all his own work.

Or are they? In fact, he has quietly recruited another ghostly little helper, freelance editor and writer Peter Ford (co-author of *The True History of the Elephant Man*). Unlike Erdal, Ford has been obliged to sign a confidentiality agreement, so there will be no more *Ghosting*-style embarrassments.

■ WHEN publishers look back on the past year, as they do in the Bookseller's group-by-group review of 2006, you can count on a feast of euphemism: "a year of consolidation", "quiet", "incredibly solid" and "sensational underlying growth" (this from Transworld with sales down 11 percent) and other risible formulae for dismal performance.

Besides the hapless celeb biog buyers at Bloomsbury and HarperCollins, those with most reasons to be fearful look to be Little Brown, now owned by Hachette. "We had five or six (!) Christmas books that we thought were a good bet, but none worked as well as we'd hoped," admits its head Ursula Mackenzie with risky candour.

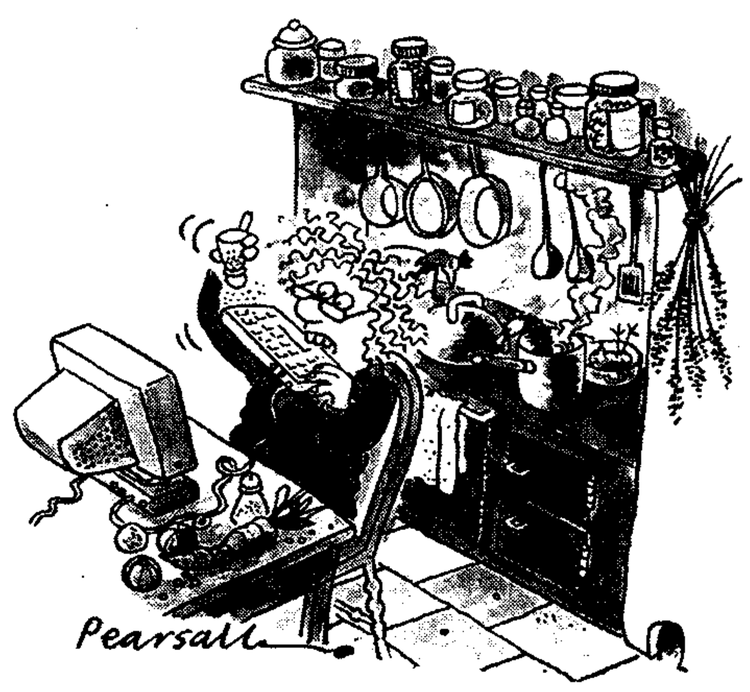
"The previous year was spectacular for Little Brown, so they were always going to go backwards," says Hachette's supremo Tim Hely Hutchinson, in a comment slyly masking menace with apparent supportiveness. The old guard plainly won't be allowed half a dozen costly flops next Christmas, but will they still be around?

■ DAVID BLUNKETT continues to do his best to prevent publishers Bloomsbury from having any chance of recouping the massive £400,000 advance they paid out for his unreadable (and largely unread) book *The Blunkett Tapes*, the latest report from the Press Complaints Commission reveals.

On 5 October last year the *Evening Standard* devoted 300 words to the fact that the book was to be published that week, noting that it was also to be serialised in both the *Daily Mail* and *Guardian* and that Blunkett would also be appearing in two episodes of the Channel 4 series *Dispatches* discussing his career.

How did the twice-resigned Cabinet minister react to this plug for his work? He immediately fired off a letter to the PCC complaining that "the newspaper had produced incessant coverage about him, which amounted – in his view – to harassment."

First Drafts



Hugh Feamley-Whittingstall

■ WHAT does a publisher do if a star author produces a novel that's worryingly skinny? This was the problem evidently faced by Picador with *Limitations*, the latest legal thriller from Scott "Presumed Innocent" Turow. At just under 200 pages, it's well below the 300 to 350-page norm for the genre.

Brilliantly, Picador faked the fatness by appending a lengthy extract from Turow's previous offering – a promotional device sometimes used in paperbacks but with much shorter samples and pages that, unlike here, are left unnumbered. *Limitations* is a hardback, priced at £16.99, so as this padding adds 39 pages, anyone buying it is paying around £2.75 for the privilege of letting Picador try to coax them into coughing up for a second book.

Pseuds Corner

Comedy is intimate; it turns on qualities we share, not those we can only admire. It is a statement of mutual understanding, a Kantian contract of proximity and universality, not a Nietzschean one of supremacy.

ZOE WILLIAMS, *Guardian*

If you had not become a lawyer, what would you have chosen and why?

I am a freelance airline pilot, skydiving instructor, skiing instructor, racing driver and much more. I would have made a career in one or more of those.

RICHARD PERKS, 'Lawyer of the Week, *The Times*

Finally, a coda to the chorus of praise for James Brown, who died on Christmas Day. For those readers who are uncomfortable with soul music, given its apparent metaphysical grounding and its links to the Christian church, let us reassure you that this great figure was an important figure for humanism. He was, after all, the father of funk. If soul was gospel gone secular, then funk was gospel gone bad. Laced with raw physicality and high-octane energy, James Brown's funk shrieked freedom and rebellion... *[continues]*

Editorial, *New Humanist*

Janine Barrand, of the Arts Centre in Melbourne, where the exhibition was first staged, said that the shorts had become a cultural icon in their own right.

"For the public there's a sense of mystery about them. We don't know who designed them but they became so recognisable. It's a real insight into performance: a sense of experimentation and trying new things that came together with a wonderful song in that video. The hotpants emerged as a symbol of that journey."

***The Times* on The Kylie Minogue Exhibition**

Without the inspiration provided by the 13th century master masons of Notre Dame de Paris, sales of Toyota's practical new Auris might prove to be a shade disappointing. Unlikely though it may seem, the designers of the new Auris hatchback decided that the swoop of the Gothic cathedral's flying buttresses would be a perfect template for the car's main interior attraction: its centre console.

The Times

Greek myth had Harpies, Sirens and Keres. We got Jade, Danielle and Jo, a mean-minded coven in velour tracksuits...Like Arthur Miller's Goody Hawkins, Goody Jade stood accused, or near enough, of consorting with the devil for calling her housemate Shilpa Fuckawallah and Shilpa Poppadom... Like Casper Hauser, the 19th century German innocent raised in a cellar, Jade, a neglected mixed-race child offered drugs at four, was a blank slate awaiting a marketable persona.

MARY RIDDELL, *Observer*

CONTRIBUTORS: APR, Emil Fortune (and others), Paul Goldman, Michael Brown, Strobes, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

WMD INTELLIGENCE

On trial

MORE evidence of the British weapons of mass destruction deception comes from the trial of US Vice-President Dick Cheney's former chief-of-staff, Lewis "Scooter" Libby.

Libby faces charges over an attempt to smear a critic of the WMD tales, ambassador Joseph Wilson, whose investigation into claims that Saddam was trying to buy uranium from Niger in February 2002 found that there was no such deal. His evidence was ignored as Bush hyped up WMD claims, and the ambassador went public in July 2003 after the invasion of Iraq. Libby is now on trial on charges related to leaked information that Wilson's wife is a CIA agent – the leak was an attempt to undermine his credibility.

So far, so American, but the Niger uranium claim was central to Blair's WMD spin, and more details of British involvement appeared in the trial. The trial papers include a CIA document called a "Senior Publish When Ready" paper – a phrase used to describe finished intelligence. The document, from June 2003, states: "A centerpiece of the British White Paper last fall was U.K. concern over Iraqi interest in foreign uranium. Given the fragmentary nature of the reporting, CIA had recommended that the UK not use this information in their paper."

So, the CIA had told Blair not to include claims about African uranium in his dossier on Saddam – understandable as the claim was untrue and related to badly forged documents. But somehow, when the Butler committee looked into the same Niger uranium claims in 2004, the CIA's warning had been magically transformed. While the Butler Review admitted the CIA had concerns, it said the agency had OK'd Blair's approach: "In preparing the dossier, the UK consulted the US. The CIA advised caution about any suggestion that Iraq had succeeded in acquiring uranium from Africa, but agreed that there was evidence that it had been sought."

While CIA warnings persuaded some US leaders to drop the phony uranium claim in the run-up to war, the fact that Blair had put the story in the British dossier meant Bush could put the Niger claim in his own high profile 2003 "State of the Union" address, a speech that acted as a rallying cry for war.

Far from being a brake on Bush, Blair effectively helped the President go beyond his own spooks in making fake claims about Iraqi WMD.

POLICE

Respect for the Law...

LAST month a jury cleared London PC David Yates of any wrongdoing despite the officer having threatened to smash a 16-year-old Kurdish boy's face in and repeatedly sworn at him.

Unbeknownst to the policeman, the teenager, Mohammed Ali, had recorded parts of his encounter with Yates on his mobile phone. In a foul-mouthed abusive tirade, Yates is clearly heard saying: "If you say one more fucking word, I'll smash your fucking Arab face in."

The teenager had been arrested by Yates, then a territorial support group officer, after he was said to have sworn at the officer. Ali was charged with a public order offence but the case was thrown out by District Judge David Simpson after the tape was played. He recommended that the recording be sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions and to Chief Knacker at the Yard in relation to both criminal and disciplinary proceedings. He said: "I cannot believe anything these officers have told me... No magistrate, judge or jury could convict on the evidence of these officers. Currently, there's a lot of talk about respect and the lack of it. Respect is not something you get by putting on a uniform, I believe respect should be earned."

Yates was charged subsequently with offences including racially aggravated abusive conduct and assault. But he was cleared after claiming that while he had acted unprofessionally, he would never have carried his threat out. Ali had a history of petty street crime and was known to the police.

During Ali's trial, Yates had denied that he was the police officer whose voice had been recorded. He told the court on that occasion: "That's not me, that doesn't sound like me, that could have been fabricated, that sounds like someone with a northern accent." Indeed he escaped a caution from the judge because he denied being the officer involved.

Curiously, the prosecuting counsel in Yates's own trial did not quiz Yates about what appears to have been an episode of lying on oath at Ali's trial. So it has been left to legal observers who were monitoring the case, to make a new complaint of perjury against Yates to the IPCC. Will this be added to any disciplinary proceedings already arising out of the incident?

Ditching assets

WHILE TB's decision to shut down the Assets Recovery Agency was greeted with joy by Gerry Adams et al (*Eye* 1177), news that it will be merged into the Serious and Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) marks yet another victory for the spooks taking over British law enforcement.

Set up in 2003, the ARA was New Labour's answer to the highly successful Irish Criminal Assets Bureau. Uniquely in British legal history, the agency was given powers to grab criminal loot through the civil courts without having to secure a conviction in the criminal courts first.

So far, so easy. But what none of the many lawyers in New Labour appear to have realised was that the targets of the new agency's attention might object to being deprived of the fruits of their labour and fight the ARA tooth and nail through the courts.

Not surprisingly, the ARA has so far failed to match the unrealistic targets set by its political masters. It became a source of embarrassment to the Home Office, leaving the ARA open to attack from empire builders at the even newer and untested SOCA.

SOCA only started work last year and has yet to make any visible impact, its leadership is littered with ex-spooks including its chairman, Sir Stephen Lander (former DG of MI5), its director of intelligence, David Bolt (MI5), and its director of intervention, Paul Evans (MI6).

Evans is understood to have lobbied for the top job at the ARA when it was set up, but lost out to Jane Earl, a former civil servant in local government. Earl was regarded by many as a breath of fresh air in law enforcement, efficient but – worst of all in spook terms – anxious to be transparent and open. The word is that Evans was the main person briefing against her and the ARA.

For purely short-term cosmetic political reasons the government is going to abolish an efficient, transparent organisation (ARA) which publishes its performance, and hand the bulging case files over to an untried but already inefficient, secretive organisation (SOCA) which will not make its performance data public. Good one Tony!

DNA

Forensic guesswork

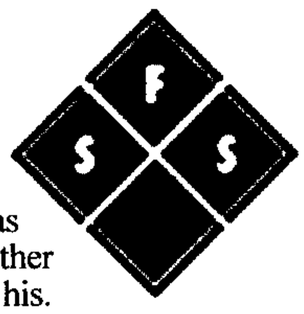
AS TONY BLAIR's controversial DNA database – with samples from more than a million innocent people – grows by the day, questions are being asked about the accuracy of methods used to identify "matches".

The UK's Forensic Science Service has adopted a system, called Low Copy Number (LCN) DNA, which is shunned by the FBI and most other law enforcement agencies because it is not scientifically validated and cannot be guaranteed as reliable.

In fact it's so unreliable that DNA testing of an IRA bomb planted in Lisburn, said to be part of a campaign that culminated in the 1998 Omagh bombing, threw up a positive match to a 14-year-old schoolboy from Nottingham. He just happens to find himself on what is now the world's largest database because he is at the centre of a paternity dispute. Yet, briefly he was considered to have "possibly played a role in the offence, possibly installing or arming the device".

As it was patently obvious that a 14-year-old in England was not part of a bombing campaign in Ulster, he was duly eliminated from the inquiry. But what if he had been an Irish nationalist?

This is the question taxing Diplock Court judge Mr Justice Weir in the trial of Sean Hoey who has pleaded not guilty to the murder of the Omagh blast victims as well as 58 offences relating to other attacks. The other "match" was his.



No one disputes that DNA analysis has improved forensic science. In cases where there is material likely to give a full DNA profile, the evidence of a "match probability" is one in a billion – the chances of choosing a person with that DNA at random from the population.

The problem is that the science has moved on so swiftly that miniscule fragments of DNA – less than 100 picograms, about the equivalent of one millionth of a grain of salt – can now be used to produce profiles. Everywhere we go we are shedding our DNA, and as Professor Allan Jamieson, director of the Forensic Institute in Glasgow, explained: "Your DNA can go to places you've never been. A correct fingerprint identification on a fixed object can establish you were at a particular point, but DNA can be transferred from you to someone else and from that someone to somewhere else where you may have never been."

A second concern is the method used to construct a profile from microscopic pieces of DNA. Rather like software reconstructing a damaged barcode, it sometimes throws up different results. The Forensic Science Service gets round this by running it twice (the standard method only requires a single run) and getting a consensus "match" on whatever turns up of the 10 areas of DNA that make up a normal full profile. Critics argue that if you ran the test again you could come up with yet more alternatives.

In other words, it could be dangerous to combine something so specific as a person's DNA, with such a sensitive test, and a DNA database, because there is the potential for innocent DNA to be found at a crime scene. That is why as Professor Dan Krane, a veteran of the OJ Simpson case, said at Hoey's trial, the system is not used in US courts.

The only countries using LCN are the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Norway. But its validity has only recently been challenged in the courts, and never more robustly than in the trial of Hoey, where the case has not gone well for the prosecution. Two police officers admitted in court that they'd "re-edited" their witness statements. And the Crown's DNA experts contradicted themselves over whether or not their methods were validated.

Orlando Pownall, QC for Hoey, urged the judge to throw out the case.

Weir will have to decide whether Pownall is right. But whether he will pronounce on the efficacy of LCN with the risk that it could re-open a string of high profile cases – including that of Peter Falconio in Australia – remains to be seen.

HEALTH SPECIAL

MEDICINE BALLS 15

Whipping Boys

Last November, the Government was forced, under the Freedom of Information Act, to publish its hit list of 77 NHS trusts at risk of closure, cuts in services and significant debt. These "heat maps" were supposed to assess whether the media fallout would be "national, regional or local", and how this might affect the re-election chances of Labour MPs. Alas, the effect has been to spawn a plethora of Save our Hospital campaigns – all capable of national publicity – and exposing "new" labour's reconfiguration plans to constant scrutiny.

This month, the Save Whipps Cross hospital campaign – which already has over 40,000 signatories to its petition – managed a public rally and a parliamentary debate. This presents "new" Labour with a huge ideological problem – having preached the mantra of patient choice and promised to put the NHS in the hands of patients, how can you ignore the choice of so many people to keep their local district general hospital fully funded and functional?

Equally important is to determine whether hospital downgrading or closure is being proposed for reasons of cost or quality. This is where the government is having great difficulty winning the argument. A key stumbling block is that, despite the aim of transferring more care into the community, hospital attendances are going up, year on year. This is due to a number of reasons; patients now find it harder to access out of hours care and choose (as Labour have encouraged them to do) to go to their local casualty department where they can be seen within 4 hours. GPs are developing special interests to reduce the burden on outpatient departments, but often their increased expertise is uncovering more illnesses that need hospital treatment. And the increasing ageing population, kept alive on buckets of blood pressure pills and statins, are needing more expert care for incurable conditions such as dementia and arthritis.

Whipps Cross also serves a very deprived population that would have difficulty travelling further for care and an increasing migrant population. And it's expected to provide frontline services for the Olympics. So perhaps not the best time to consider downsizing it. An additional, and common, factor threatening the future of Whipps Cross is its neighbouring PFI hospital. Queen's Hospital Romford has such a large mortgage to pay off that its only hope of survival is to cannibalise the services from surrounding hospitals. As all the local hospitals and PCTs are in debt, and the extra funding for the NHS is about to dry up, clearly something has to give. And it's unlikely to be a brand new flag ship PFI hospital even if patients would rather go to Whipps Cross. Choice? Who needs it?

M.D.

NHS I.T.

Public healthcare

"THE most rigorous controls will be put in place to ensure the privacy of information and people..." That was the Department of Health's reassurance last year to campaigners against plans to load medical records on to a central database under the NHS's National Programme for IT.

Hospitals will supposedly access and add to the database using their own systems installed under the programme. There's just one snag – problems with these very systems are compromising the promised security. At South Warwickshire hospital the IT system put in by American supplier CSC takes so long to log on to that the trust has permitted clinicians to share their smartcards – effectively making them all the same user as far as the computer is concerned.

The British Medical Association pointed out that "sharing access not only puts at risk the security of the system but also disrupts the audit trail which tracks who has accessed parts of the record".

After much protest, the Department of Health climbed down on its insistence that everyone's records go on the central record. A few more people might take up the opt-out that was eventually conceded once they know of the tricks being used to cope with the National Programme's wretched computer systems.

DR FOSTER

Healthy profits

ON THE very day last week that the Prime Minister told Parliament he would be pushing ahead with even greater commercialisation of the health service, the body entrusted with the task was exposed for breaking procurement law and selling the taxpayer short by millions.

The National Audit Office report on the Health Information Centre's joint venture with Dr Foster (*Eyes passim*), which was pushed through by the Department of Health's Commercial Directorate, criticised the project as costing millions more than it should have and failing to allow any competition for the deal.

The Health Service, i.e. the taxpayer, paid £12m for its interest in the venture known as Dr Foster Intelligence, which will sell health data to trusts. The price included a "strategic premium" – for which the NAO could find no justification – of up to £4m. Of the £12m, £7.6m went straight to Dr Foster's shareholders, including founder Tim Kelsey. A further £2.5m was spent on consultants and lawyers.

The NAO concluded, "there is a real risk that this joint venture may result in a less competitive health informatics market". For one thing, the Department of Health now has an interest in promoting the main player – and it will need to see decent returns to justify the exorbitant "strategic premium". There were also alarming conflicts of interest. The same government adviser, KPMG, designed the deal's specification whilst arranging the JV with Dr Foster. Even Dr Foster itself was paid £50,000 for advice on the informatics market on which it stood to cash in so profitably.

Those involved can't see anything wrong. Dr Foster Intelligence chief operating officer John Pendlebury-Green sent an email to all staff declaring the auditor's findings "ill-informed – some of you will already know my views of the competence of the NAO".

Despite this contempt for the rules, the Commercial Directorate continues to push through more health privatisation, while KPMG trousers millions as Patsy Hewitt's preferred consultant on turning round NHS financial woes.

NURSING

Patsy's porky

THE Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt is still convinced that community health services can pick up the slack for the NHS, if her answers in a Downing Street-organised webchat are anything to go by.

"GPs and their colleagues – like community nurses – are doing far more to prevent ill-health," she told one questioner, while a woman caring for her sick husband was told that "NHS community specialist nurses can also help people be supported in their own home".

The reality, as reported in previous *Eyes*, is that community nursing is being cut back all over the country. In Manchester nurses and occupational therapists held a one-day strike last week to highlight the cutting of 33 nursing posts in the community mental health and social care service. Meanwhile in Sheffield the Primary Care Trust announced a review of community nursing staff as it tackles a £15m overspend.

Further proof of the drop in community nursing is seen in figures obtained by the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association under the Freedom of Information Act last week. They discovered a 40 percent drop in training places available for health visitors at colleges and universities this year, compared with 2005-6. The drop is largely down to health authorities not commissioning the specialist courses because they can't afford to. The number of places for school nurses had also dropped.

Meanwhile in Scotland there is controversy over plans to merge the role of health visitors, who mainly work with children and their parents, with district nurses, who mainly work with the chronically ill. The plan is opposed by GPs and public health academics who say that the workload of dealing with sick people will leave little time for the important preventative work done by health visitors.

● MAINTAINING the mantra of "choice" in health services, Patricia Hewitt last month announced a new NHS information website to "give patients more power" in making decisions about their care.

It will apparently bring together information on all hospitals and treatment centres, help people assess their own health risks, enable them to join discussion groups and tell them what services are where and how to access them.

Sounds like a good idea. And indeed it is, so much so that just such a website, "Best Treatments", attracted two million patients last year to consult its independent evidence-based assessments of the best treatments available. It is, according to the Patients Association, a brilliant source of information to give patients real power in choosing their treatment. And in true New Labour joined-up-government style, Hewitt has quietly axed Department of Health funding for it. Brilliant!

DEFENCE

Milking IT

MORE on the government's largest IT supplier, EDS, which is doing everything it can to keep the billions rolling in from the taxpayer at profit levels far exceeding those it makes from anyone else (*Eye* 1174).

The latest shrewd move in the firm's self-declared strategy to "protect government business and expand" has been to recruit directly from a key government client, the Ministry of Defence, from which it earns more than a billion pounds a year.

Enter Michael Dugher, the special adviser to former defence secretary Geoff Hoon, who took over as head of the company's PR machine. Hoon's rein at the MoD was certainly a happy one for EDS; it saw the company win the first phase of a £4bn deal to overhaul military IT under the "defence information infrastructure" (DII) programme.

Despite cocking up the introduction of a new forces payroll system since then, things have improved further on the defence front during Dugher's first few months at the company. EDS is a member of the Metrix consortium that has just won the defence training PFI contract (see last *Eye*) and recently bagged the second phase of DII even though insiders remain distinctly unimpressed with its performance on the first.

Dugher was chairman of Labour Students in 1997 and an unsuccessful Labour candidate in the 2001 election, when the young idealist declared: "If you want to change things for the better, politics is the only way." Another way, it now seems, is to lobby for a Texan IT firm that milks the taxpayer.

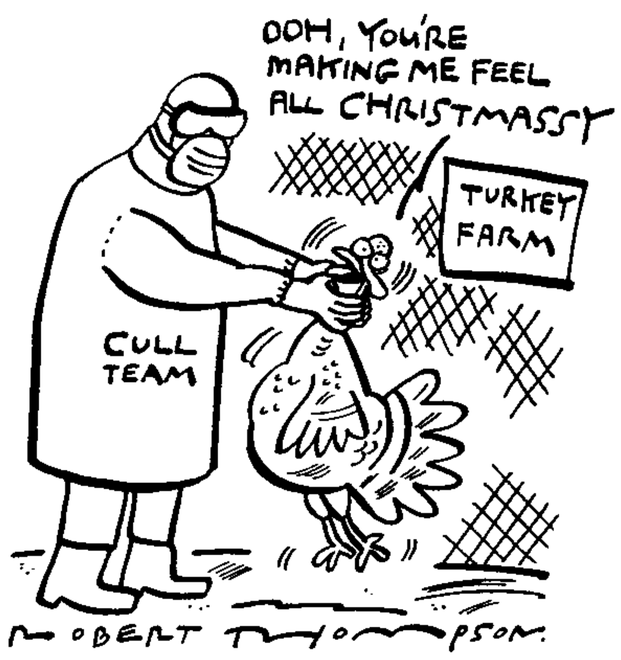
You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

AN UNLIKELY source of possible help to Yates of the Yard in his cash-for-honours investigation could already be in prison. Carl Cushnie is a fraudster and a one-time favourite of the Dear Leader, who once again shows his poor judgment when it comes to the rich.

Cushnie featured in a Labour Party TV broadcast for the 1997 election campaign. The fact that he was black, successful and backing New Labour was seen as good news. So much so that the Prime Minister introduced him to President Clinton as "one of Britain's leading black businessmen". His company, Versailles, which specialised in financing trade deals for small companies, was a stock market success valued at more than £600m at its brief peak.

Cushnie's closeness to Downing Street continued after Labour came to power. He is understood to have had dinner with Tony and Cherie on at least one occasion – in 1998. Not surprisingly he also became known to Michael "Lord Cashpoint" Levy, the chief Labour fundraiser. Whether Cushnie had donated previously is not clear. What is known is that in 1999 he offered to make a six-figure donation. Not surprisingly, Labour rushed to accept.



Those then close to Cushnie in Versailles say that he was in regular contact with Lord Levy and bragged that he was to receive an honour, possibly a peerage, in the Millennium list at the start of 2000. But then things went very badly wrong at Versailles. The Department of Timidity & Inaction began an inquiry in early 1999 into one of its clients that raised questions about Versailles' accounting. The timing of Cushnie's rush to donate suggests he might have thought this could be a useful insurance policy.

There were soon suspicions – which quickly proved true – that Versailles was a circular money fraud, with a black hole in the accounts of £100m plus and growing. Cushnie unloaded shares worth £29m in November 1999 without mentioning the DTI investigation. The bubble burst in early December 1999. An independent accountant's report raised more questions about the real numbers, and Versailles shares were suspended. Accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers were called in and discovered the fraud within days. A criminal investigation began, and Versailles collapsed in late January 2000.

Cushnie's then associates claim that throughout the period after the suspension he maintained he was still in line for a peerage. He claimed to be in contact with Levy and said that if the suspension was lifted he would still become Lord Cushnie. An angry Cushnie also claimed that he was determined to get his money back when his name – unsurprisingly – did not appear in the New Year Honours. But this, he claimed, was proving difficult.

Whether any of this is true (Cushnie is not the most reliable witness, he denied any knowledge of the long-running fraud), the Versailles collapse clearly rattled Labour. Party insiders have since put a different spin on events, perhaps because for two years the party neither declared the donation nor gave it back. The money is said to have remained in an escrow account until late in 2001, when it was handed back to Cushnie, who by then had been charged with fraud. Cushnie, they say, could have had it back at any time.

Interestingly there was no mention of any money owed by Labour to Cushnie in a 2002 report into his finances produced by his accountants for the trial. By then Cushnie needed cash to pay the expensive lawyers he hired for his (failed) defence.

Cushnie and his partner in fraud, finance director Fred Clough, were jailed in 2004. Cushnie was convicted of defrauding investors in a parallel private trading business. Clough pleaded guilty to the fraud at Versailles Group and testified against Cushnie. He and Cushnie were jailed for six years. Cushnie is already said to be out on day release and is expected to be released on parole this year – a process expedited by the £10.1m he handed over to compensate victims of the fraud last November. A compensation order was made in 2005; the money came largely from the sale of a house near St Tropez.

In recent weeks, Cushnie has also agreed a generous individual voluntary arrangement with his creditors: he is to pay £300,000 over three years. Some creditors are far from happy as he was estimated to have made more than £20m from the Versailles fraud.

The story of Carl Cushnie and New Labour is one the Dear Leader and Lord Levy would no doubt prefer to forget. The question is whether their former benefactor will be keen to remind them now that Yates of the Yard is on the case.

TORY MP for Banbury Tony Baldry, an old *Eye* favourite, received support at the 2005 election from one Chris Moore, described as a "constituent, personal donor". One hopes this is not the Chris Moore who is now very much ex-chairman of software group Torex Retail, and whose Banbury home was raided by the Serious Farce Office last month as part of a false accounting investigation. Moore stepped down after the raid.

Moore was central to the rise and rise of Torex, which merged with rival software group iSOFT in 2003. Ironically in view of what has now happened, it was the due diligence investigation commissioned by Torex which first exposed the aggressive revenue recognition accounting policies being used by iSOFT, whose profits since proved to have been largely illusory. But despite these doubts, Moore and Torex went ahead with the deal. Exactly why this should be the case is an interesting question given what has happened since, which should not have surprised Moore, an accountant. But then, he was a multi-million beneficiary of the takeover and left before the balloon burst.

Moore and another raid target, Mark Woodbridge, were briefly chief executive and finance director of iSOFT before they fell out with the old iSOFT faction and left in 2004 with large golden goodbyes – £1m for Moore and almost £500,000 for Woodbridge. Moore then spun the Torex Retail business out of iSOFT and on to the AIM market.

The fact that aggressive accounting for revenue recognition is now at the heart of the investigation into Torex Retail is a remarkable case of "déjà vu all over again", as baseball's Yogi Berra famously remarked.

The Fundamentally Supine Authority is currently investigating iSOFT's financial reporting to the stock market. It is expected to take action against certain former directors, several of whom successfully unloaded millions of shares on the fictional figures.

Meanwhile iSOFT's auditors RSM Robson Rhodes and those directors who are accountants (such as former chief executive Patrick Cryne, commercial director Steve Graham and finance director Tim Whiston) are under investigation by the bean counters' new regulator, the Accountancy Investigation & Disciplinary Board. The strong suspicion is that Robson Rhodes will be blamed for not standing up to its clients at iSOFT, whom it saw as superior beings because they came from Big Four firm KPMG.

CITY observers are far from surprised at the Dear Leader's failure to condemn the "locusts" of private equity groups, as reported in the last *Eye*.

The British Venture Capital Association has been keen to cosy up to Labour. And it had an inside edge in Sir Ronald Cohen, the founder of Apax Partners. Cohen has been a generous donor to Labour since switching in 1996 from the Liberal Democrats. He was a regular donor before donations became disclosable in detail, and since 2001 has donated £1.3m, making him one of the party's biggest funders. He is a close friend of Gordon Brown, so the "locusts" should have little to fear after Blair's exit – no matter how many British jobs and assets they strip.

Whether that even more generous Labour supporter, Lord David Sainsbury, shares this view is less certain. His family firm has become the

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DREDGE & RIGG

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I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU'RE ON A HUNDRED TIMES OUR PAY, SIR J
YOU'RE WORTH EVERY PENNY SIR J
BOARDROOM
GOD BLESS YOU, SIR!
SEE? NO MORE DEFERRING TO THOSE UNION BARONS!
236.

latest £11bn target for the "locusts". And, even more embarrassingly, one of the private equity groups eyeing J Sainsbury is Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, whose camp includes Labour peer Lord Clive Hollick. Nothing personal or political, David, it's only business.

PERHAPS not surprisingly, SFO director Robert Wardle has not been rewarded for standing up – if only for a while – to his boss, the attorney-general Lord Goldsmith, over Tony Blair's decision to drop the BAE Saudi corruption case, and for then delicately exposing the fact that it was a decision with which he did not agree.

The news that Wardle is to have his contract extended for another year is not the vote of confidence it might appear. Unlike his two predecessors, Wardle was never given a five-year contract. As the internal candidate promoted in 2003, it is understood he was given only a two-year contract, which was then renewed in 2005. The initial job offer was said to carry a four-year tenure.

Given that Goldsmith knew Wardle well from his work at the SFO, where he has been since it opened in 1988, that smacks of a lack of enthusiasm. As do the suggestions that Goldsmith wanted to test the market for a new appointment two years ago.

Wardle was the best candidate available on both occasions. But he is said never to have enjoyed the attorney-general's full confidence. This may explain Goldsmith's decision to overrule the SFO director on BAE – declaring there was no case to successfully prosecute – while maintaining the fiction that it was Wardle's decision to pull the plug.

The fact that the director's contract would run out in April was no doubt something both men were aware of in the weeks leading up to the decision in December. Goldsmith must have realised it would look even worse if Wardle walked. But it is not clear whether Wardle ever gave his boss the "back me or sack me" option. Those who know the career civil servant well suspect it never came to that point. Goldsmith has never been asked whether he threatened to sack the SFO director if he did not agree with the Downing Street decision.

The question now is whether the government thinks it is time for a new approach to fraud. The "thorough external review" of the investigation and prosecution of cases announced by Goldsmith at the same time as he reappointed Wardle suggests it may think that, after 20 years, it is time for a change.

The SFO has been the subject of several previous reviews – the Fraud Review was completed only last year. So it's unclear what a further review could produce. As to what can be learned from "other jurisdictions", well the only one that does fraud cases much better is the United States – with the aid of a type of plea bargaining not liked by British courts and the threat of lengthy prison sentences unknown in Britain.

The US, however, knows how to prosecute foreign corruption cases. It nails the American facilitators or bribers and embarrasses the foreign rulers and officials. And it has been doing that for almost thirty years under the type of law Britain still does not have, despite the rhetoric of the Dear Leader and his legal poodle. But Goldsmith would not want to learn that. He was unamused by American criticism of the BAE decision at the OECD meeting in Paris last month.

Which leaves the thought that maybe Goldsmith wants to roll the SFO in part into that still unproven Blairite creation, the Serious Organised Crime Agency, or create a new fraud agency based on the Crown Prosecution Service's fraud unit, which was beefed up last year. The SFO as such could then disappear like that more recent Blair creation, the Assets Recovery Agency, also bound for SOCA.

By not extending Wardle's contract beyond April 2008, Goldsmith now has all his options open for either a complete new start or a new start with a new director.

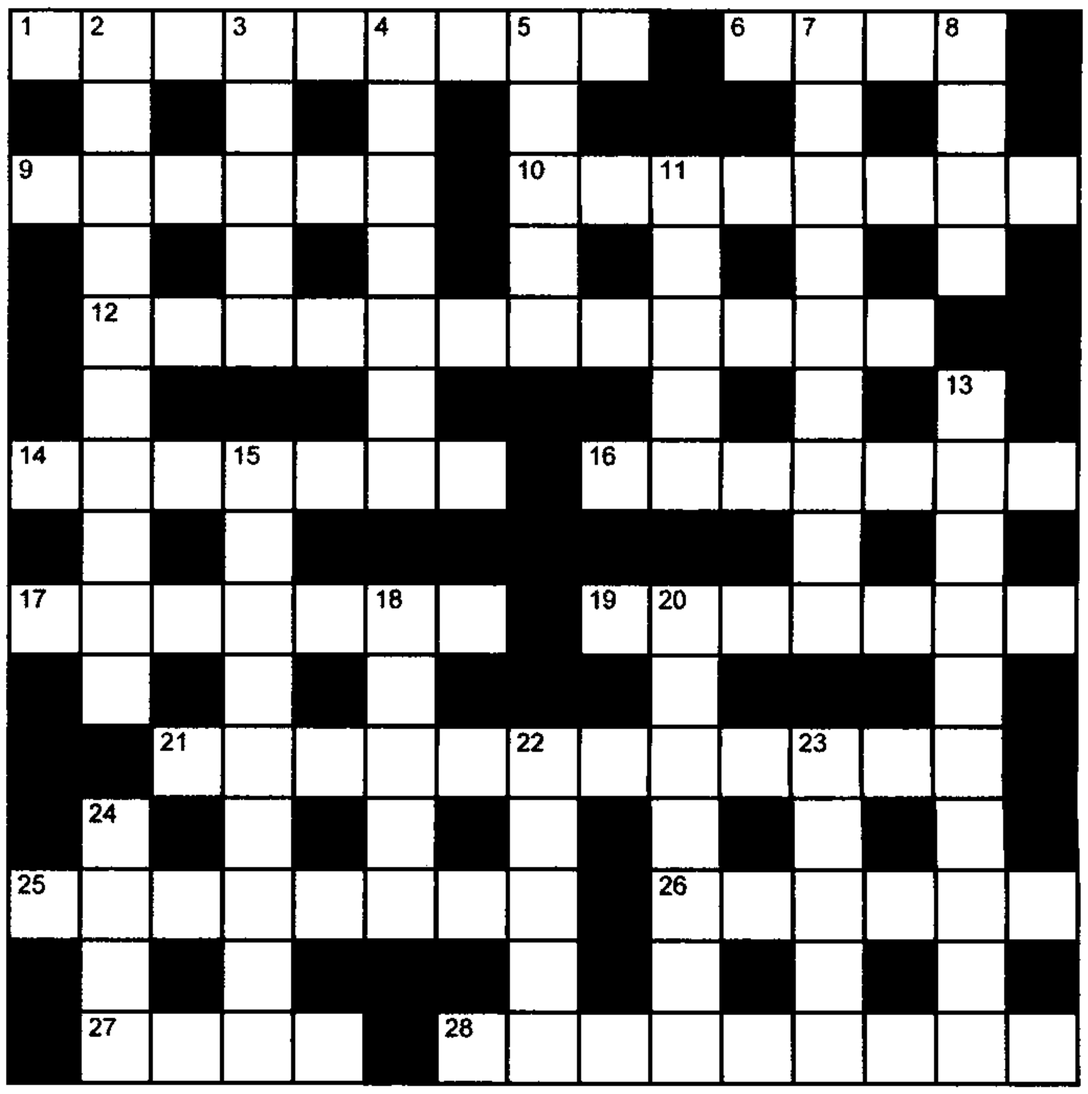
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 333

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 23 February 2007

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Unfortunate poor stuffed by the like of *Pravda* and Stalin maybe (9)

6 Serial, you might hear, sex (4)

9 Plant cigar improperly round Lewinsky's opening (6)

10 Leo gets disorientated with a lift going down (8)

12/4 What Britain's turning into, apparently? A community in thrall to *Big Brother* (12,7)

14 Cast off organ found in middle of road? (4,3)

16 One way to introduce drug ring, yes, is to shilly-shally (7)

17 Wary about central heating: it leads to randiness (7)

19 Bear gets hots badly when hugging Bud (7)

21 Tory's hint to country in need of leader – "There'll be no shit in this state" (12)

25 Dick looked askew (8)

26 Speaker, not a giving sort, brought about Campbell's end (6)

27 A tosser's balls (4)

28 Men, erect – excited about cross stools (9)

DOWN

2 Big-hipped Sarah, after tweaking top of panties, comes in pissed (4-6)

3 Brenda's straight strip? (5)

4 See 12ac.

5 One responsible for old dyke sitting on girl's bottom? Tripe! (5)

7 Charisma laughable, Brown finally gets in – no belief in government (9)

8 Scumbag's way to success (4)

11 After ale corroded kidney, extremely incontinent (5)

13 Organisation for those getting on top of Anne – e.g. perverse business (3,7)

15 Blown by rubber-clad sporty type, who then proceeds to swallow? (9)

18 Having big tits, new top needed (reddish-brown) (5)

20 Blunt, possibly tart or rude about one (7)

22 Finger old girlfriend after accepted on date (5)

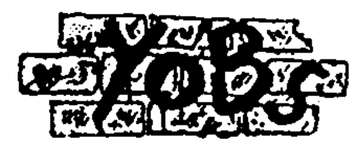
23 Many religious followers put one on Pan (5)

24 Round figure appropriated by Maxwell? Big mistake (4)

Crossword 332 winner: Christine Armstrong

ACROSS: 1 Acts up 5 Schnapps 9 Alcoholism 10 Loll 11 Well-to-do 12 Rehash 13/20 Safe seat 15 Optimum 17 Phone-in 22 Unbend 23 Osculate 25 Ugli 26 Tight-arsed 27 St George 28 Eldest.

DOWN: 2 Cul-de-sac 3 Stool 4 Pro bono 5 Slip of the tongue 6 Humdrum 7 All thumbs 8 Polish 14 Expletive 16 Tactless 18 Oldster 19 Necktie 21 Knight 24 Lurid.



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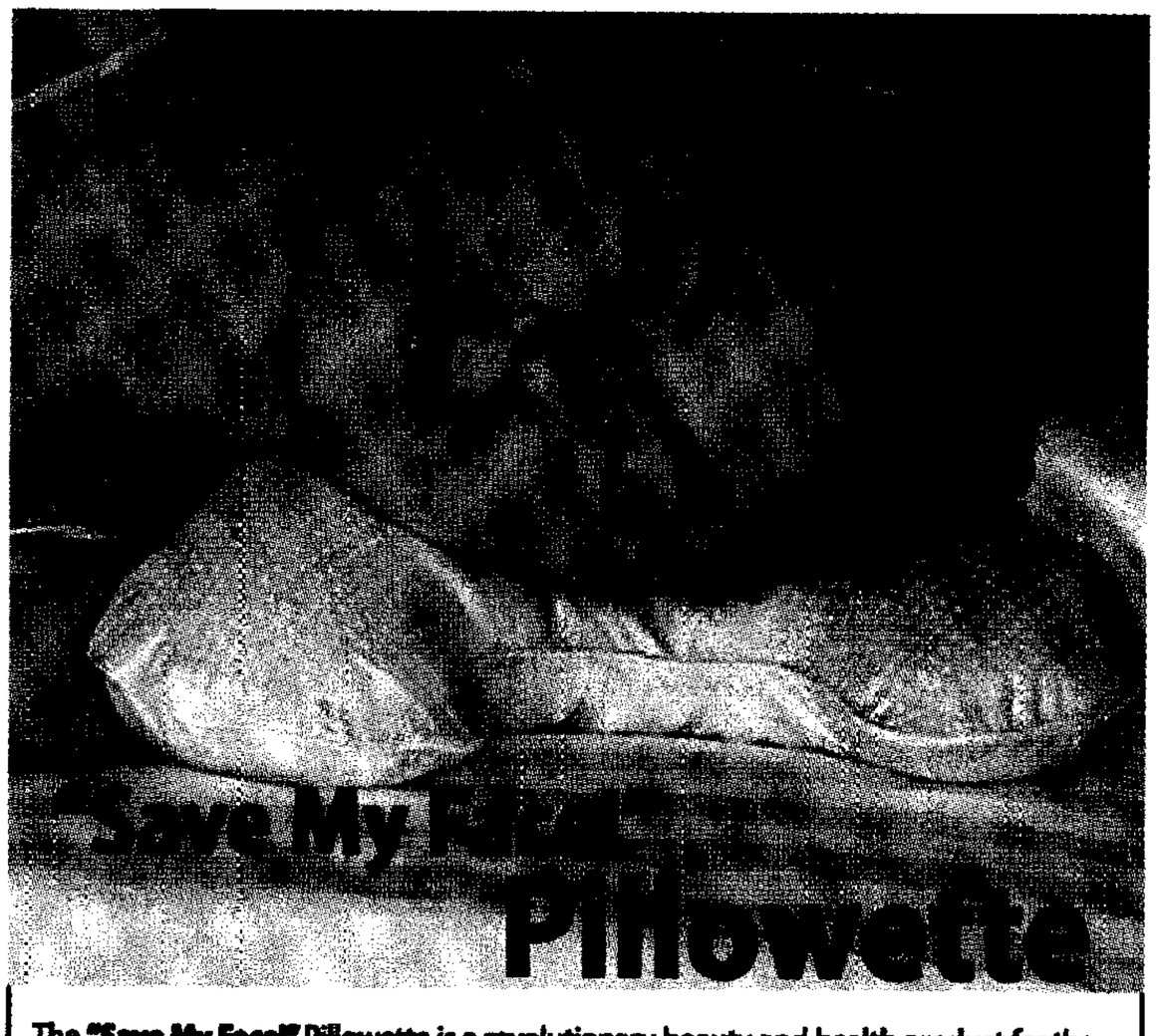

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GREG AND PHOEBE say welcome to Rhona Barbara Tealby Watson (20/1/07), and well done Elf / Mummy!

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DESPERATE FAMILY with two young children and moving house, needs £30K for URGENT repairs. Already struggling with mortgage and got outstanding debts. Please help. Thank you. NatWest, S/C: 50-30-20. A/C: 25555995. Email: salim01@tiscali.co.uk

LADY URGENTLY NEEDS £300. Sincere thanks. S/C: 53-50-36. A/C: 13690159. tara123@btinternet.com

UNLUCKY BUSINESMAN needs to repay long suffering loyal wife for 20 years of misery. S/C: 56-00-70. A/C: 36523690. goldenpauls@btinternet.co.uk

DISABLED WAR PENSIONER needs to borrow £40K for 6 to 12 months to complete conversion of London home into flats. Will repay £50K on completion. Tomsproject@hotmail.co.uk Donations or smaller loans gratefully accepted, S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 16592378.

PLEASE HELP YOUNG SUFFERER of manic depression, lost job, any donations! S/C: 40-20-44. A/C: 51599526.

YOUNG, INTELLIGENT DESPERATE male in emotional, financial, social black hole urgently need friends, mentors, opportunities. Tel: 07984 151 456.

DESPERATE TO REDUCE 'working-week' to concentrate on final months at University. S/C: 60-40-08. A/C: 32536518.

SKINT: Final year medical student. £20K debt. Please help! NatWest, S/C: 601239. A/C: 33716137.

SACKED after reporting sexual harassment, bills to cover until I find a new job. Any help gratefully received. HSBC, S/C: 40-24-18. A/C: 51175432.

TALENTED GRADUATE struggling for journalism work, all help appreciated S/C: 40-20-23. A/C: 11342053.

GASTROPARESIS SUFFERER... with debt, sick two years, NIL-pay returning to my job summer 2007. Anything appreciated. (william5@hotmail.co.uk) S/C: 40-47-86. A/C: 02136368.

DENTAL DISASTER. NHS won't pay. No teeth, no job. S/C: 30-00-08. A/C: 00433936.

HELP! Young filmmaker seeks freedom from cerebrum-rotting wage slavery. S/C: 60-16-07. A/C: 87053683.

YOUNG LEGAL AID lawyer: Struggling against cuts and student debts to defend the innocent. S/C: 40-02-07. A/C: 31470019.

I NEED TO START SAVING for a deposit for a flat. Need to pay off credit card and loan first. Any help would be most gratefully appreciated. S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 25455127.

SILLY SUSEX GIRL got carried away with life. Urgently needs 15K to start again. hannahrapley@hotmail.co.uk

HARD WORKING, single mother in full-time employment seeks financial assistance to fund an 18-month sabbatical to care for my autistic daughter. Lloyds-TSB, S/C: 30-92-45. A/C 13744968. Email: clare_ds100@yahoo.co.uk

SERIOUS ARTIST seeks sponsor / patron to help fund participation in this year's Florence Biennale. View work (and contact): www.ruthaddinall.co.uk

PENNILESS FOLLOWING DIVORCE thanks to vindictive ex-husband and incompetent solicitor, struggling to start afresh. Desperately need college fees enabling new career. Help enormously appreciated, Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 21065166.

TALENTED, COMMITTED, ambitious, seeks 23K for baroque violin (instrumental for career). S/C: 30-87-60. A/C: 14445668. unaltered.neck@gmail.com

AFTER TWO YEARS of hip operations and physiotherapy I am finally working again (part-time). Desperately need to pay off debts and get life back on track: S/C: 77-19-60. A/C: 03932860.

NEVER BEGGED BEFORE. Please help. Anything. Desperate. Thanks. S/C: 20-99-56. A/C: 00447293.

IN DEEP WATERS. Need a float. Any amount appreciated. S/C: 60-09-23. A/C: 15207323. Mobile: 07951 510 598.

EAGER BUT POOR third year student / filmmaker, single Mum, rent £700pm, planning to make amazing documentaries but worried about finances. Any donations to LloydsTSB S/C: 30-99-90. A/C: 45350768. Any help much appreciated.

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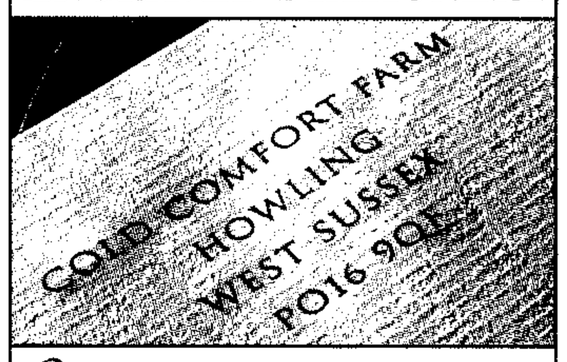

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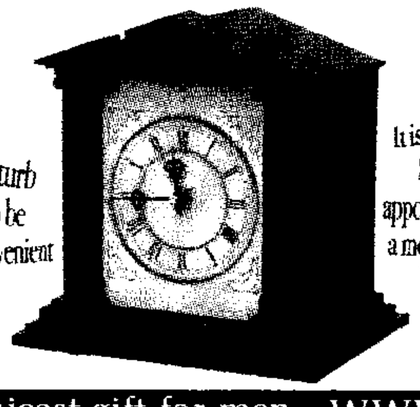
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